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Junior High School Student Perceptions on the Nature and Extent of School Violence

by

Irene Maria MacDonald

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Department of Educational Policy Studies

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1995

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I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. My personal approach creates the climate...
In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized.

(Haim Ginott)

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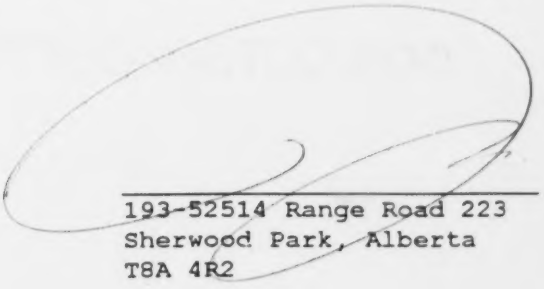

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The undersigned certify the they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT PERCEPTIONS ON THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE submitted by IRENE MARIA MACDONALD in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION in EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION.

W. G. Maynes

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J. L. da Costa

J. L. da Costa

J. G. Paterson

J. G. Paterson

Date:

October 5, 1995

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to all those students who are silently suffering the fear, humiliation, pain, and helplessness that may result from school violence. It is hoped that the results of this and future research leads to an increased awareness of violent behaviors and a commitment by our politicians, educators, parents and community to provide all students with a safe environment for learning.

Abstract

This thesis reports the findings of an Alberta-based study which explored perceptions of 231 students and 28 administrators as to the nature, frequency and management of a broad spectrum of violent behaviors in their junior high schools.

Findings point to a significant difference in student and administrator perceptions of: (a) the extent of violent activities, (b) student satisfaction with the treatment of perpetrators and victims, (c) teacher awareness of school violence, and (d) the extent to which students would report victimization.

It was found that administrators do not always avoid or deny that a problem may exist. In many cases, students are simply electing not to report their victimization. Although fear of retribution from perpetrators of violence were factors, the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, whether others were witnessing the incident, perceptions students' had of how effectively victims and perpetrators were dealt with by school staff, the perceived seriousness of the behavior and the perceived ability to deal with conflicts were also key contributing factors.

Acknowledgments

Without the support and assistance provided by a number of individuals, this study would not have been possible.

I am indeed indebted to my committee, Dr. Bill Maynes, Dr. José da Costa and Dr. John Paterson. Their wisdom, patience, mentoring and insights were integral to the completion of this research. A special thanks is also extended to Mrs. Chris Prokop who was always willing to run yet another data analysis; share her expertise, humor, advice and encouragement. I also wish to thank Dr. Bill Duke, Dr. Al MacKay, Dr. Frank Peters, and Dr. Eugene Ratsoy who offered encouragement, support and faith in my abilities to pursue this work.

We all believe that as parents, we not experience a "generation gap" with our children. Notwithstanding this presumption, I have realized that indeed I do not always understand their world. For this reason, I sought counsel from those "in the know": my 13 year old son Patrick, his numerous friends and my 11 year old twin boys, Mark and Michael. These young people were able to patiently, articulately and enthusiastically explain to me the realities of what they face in today's schools. Many times, their stories were heart-wrenching and served as motivation to continue in the hopes of furthering our adult understanding of the challenges many students face. I am indeed grateful to them for opening my eyes.

Finally, I wish to thank my husband, Joe. Researching the topic of school violence was fraught with emotion and challenges, not to mention over 200 surveys and data output files that quickly commanded the household. Nonetheless, I was bestowed with all the loving support, advice and encouragement needed for me to complete this study. I thank you all.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In Canada the number of violent criminal incidents among young people has increased in recent years (Statistics Canada, Canadian Center for Justice Statistics, The Young Offender in Canada, 1988-89, cited in Jenkins, A., 1993). Some studies and statistics seem to also indicate that school violence has increased in degree and frequency (MacDougall, 1993; Newark & Kessel, 1994). Unfortunately, this perception has been formed based on data gathered primarily from administrators, (e.g., Wall, 1995), teachers (e.g.,BCTF, 1994; Wall, 1991); and police (e.g., Newark & Kessel, 1994), but not extensively from students themselves.

The literature indicates that school violence is often understated by school staff (Heath, 1994; Pepler, & Craig, 1994), and that students themselves are reluctant to report incidents of violence (Ryan, Mathews, & Banner, 1993). Little data has been collected in Alberta to either support or refute these claims.

As part of the on-going commitment of educators to provide students with a safe community of learning, it is meaningful to understand the extent and context of school violence, from the perspective of the students.

Violent behaviors have existed in our schools since they were first built. A generation ago, the school yard bully was physically intimidating; a person who everyone knew should not be agitated. Today, that bully may still be the "big guy," but

he can equally be the "little guy" with a "big gun" or "big knife." Offord (1994) argued that in many incidents of school violence, fists have been replaced by weapons, such as knives, and guns. Walker's (1994) study on weapons use in Canadian schools found that 42% of police agencies polled reported seizing knives from youth aged 12 to 17 years within schools and on school property. This figure increased from 35% reported the previous year. For the same time period, 74% of surveyed school authorities, representing sixty-nine school boards across Canada, reported seizing knives from students; up from 58% in 1992.

In the past 20 years, it is believed that not only has school violence increased, so too has the nature of that violence changed. The Canadian Teachers' Federation, in its 1993 report, (cited in MacDougall, 1993) agreed that violent incidents over the past five years were on the increase and added that the perpetrators were becoming younger.

The violence observed in Canadian schools cannot be viewed in isolation from the violence prevalent in a society that has changed in many ways over the past decades. This generation of youth has faced an almost indifferent acceptance of violence. By the time a person is 18, he or she has viewed 28,000 murders on television; a woman is sexually assaulted every 6 minutes in Canada; the biggest users of pornography are boys between 12-18 years of age; four of every ten sexual assault victims are children, four are teens; of the 150,000 street children in Canada, 94% have been physically abused, 80% sexually abused. Thirty-five percent of the criminal caseload in Canada is

comprised of Young Offender Act violations and represent crimes that are committed both inside and outside of the school (Newark, & Kessle, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

The problem of school violence is of widespread concern in Alberta's communities, reflecting increased alarm over societal violence. Over the past nine years violent offence charges among Canadian youth have more than doubled (Statistics Canada, 1990-91). Statistics have also shown that the highest-risk group for violent offences is represented in junior high schools with children aged 13 to 15 years (Ryan, Mathews, & Banner, 1993).

These statistics can lead to much discussion as to the safety of our schools today, as compared to a decade or two ago. The danger of concentrating on comparative statistics alone, is that it can divert attention away from dealing with the current problem.

Shaver (1981) tells us that it is often the perception of reality that drives action more that the reality itself. A study of students' perceptions regarding school violence, its nature and extent, would therefore be a useful first step to understanding the problem as it presently exists for our students. It was with the intent of establishing such a reference point and contrasting students' perceptions to those of administrators of junior high schools, that the study reported herein was undertaken.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of students and administrators of Alberta's junior

high schools with respect to the nature, extent, awareness, and management of violent behavior in their schools. Data were collected from students about their understanding of the nature and frequency of school violence as well as their perceptions of teacher and administrator awareness of and response to such violent behaviors. These student data were compared to administrators' perceptions of the extent and management of violent behavior in the schools.

Subproblems

In general, the questions of students were directed at determining: (a) how safe they felt in their school; (b) whether or not they perceived their school as an environment of violence; and if so, (c) what they perceived to be the nature of the violent incidents experienced. Questions were framed to examine circumstances under which students would take responsibility for informing an adult, teacher or principal, of a violent incident that they had witnessed or were victims of. Data were gathered so as to allow analysis on the basis of many variables, including (a) grade, (b) gender, (c) the characteristics of the perpetrator, (d) the victim, and (e) the perceived seriousness of the incident itself.

Questions related to the management of school violence addressed how satisfied students were with the manner in which either victims or perpetrators of violence were dealt with by the school administrator and teachers.

Significance of the Study

The problem of school violence is of widespread concern in Canadian communities. Unfortunately, much of the literature to date has focused on perceptions and statistics as drawn from the media, teachers, politicians and law enforcement agencies, not students themselves.

Notwithstanding the need for collaboration among students, teachers, administrators, parents, police, the courts, and government to reduce youth crime and violence, there is a strong belief that society's best investment lies in the education system.

In order for schools to improve continually and develop new strategies for dealing with violent behavior, they must first understand the nature and extent of the problem. Ascertaining students' perceptions of school violence, as well as better understanding how and why students, as victims and/or perpetrators, experience and respond to violent behavior would be beneficial in this regard.

Thus the practical significance of the study resides in the potential for the results of this and related research in the area of school violence to lead to the development of new programs or to enhance existing programs of violence prevention and intervention.

The theoretical significance relates to the focus of this study on student perceptions of violence, a matter little explained in recent literature.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are used in this report.

Junior High School

"Junior high school" refers to those schools offering instructional programs authorized by the Alberta Department of Education, with students in grades 7, 8, and 9.

Violence

Historically, school violence has been synonymous with criminal activities that occurred at school: gang wars, illicit drug use, vandalism, weapon possession and personal assault (e.g., Marvin et al., 1976). This view has progressively changed and grown to encompass a far broader range of inappropriate behaviors, including more than crimes dealt with in youth court. Current definitions include physical and non-physical acts, harassment, verbal slurs and threats of injury (Jaffe, 1993).

At a recent Canadian Conference on Violence in Schools (1994), the context of violence was expanded further to include "anything that denies human dignity and leads to a sense of helplessness and hopelessness" (attributed to Martin Luther King by Lalonde, 1994). Within this framework, school violence is not limited to schools in large urban centres. Surreptitious, and often subtle forms of violence such as intimidation, harassment, and discrimination can occur in any school: urban, rural, public, separate, suburban or inner-city.

Assumptions

The primary assumptions underlying this study are summarized as follows:

1. Students and administrators will provide truthful responses in their questionnaires.
2. Valid data regarding student and administrator perceptions of the nature, extent and management of violence in junior high schools can be attained by means of a questionnaire.
3. The instruments used to measure student and administrator perceptions of the nature, extent and management of school violence are appropriate for these purposes.

Limitations of the Study

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (1990), the use of questionnaires presents the following concerns: (a) unclear or seemingly ambiguous questions cannot be clarified; (b) the respondent has no opportunity to expand or react verbally to a question of interest or importance; (c) selection-type items on questionnaires may exclude choices that the respondent would have included. Advantages of using questionnaires, as outlined by Gay (1992), are: (a) they are more efficient, requiring less time, and expense; (b) they permit collection of data from a much larger sample; (c) there is greater confidence in the anonymity of a mail-out, if used.

Through a pilot study used to pre-test the questionnaire on students and an administrator, efforts were extended to minimize the disadvantages of using a questionnaire in this study. As well, the researcher personally administered the

questionnaire to students, thus was available to answer any questions of clarification. This advantage was not extended to the administrators, who completed questionnaires without the researcher available.

The study explored the perceptions of the respondents only at the time the questionnaires were administered. The limitation that this introduces is that there are many variables that could impact both students' and administrators' perceptions of the nature, extent and management of school violence at a given time: personal problems, time of school year, recent isolated incident of violence.

Third, there were a small number of students (9) that had responded to the open-ended question using very offensive language. In one incident, there had been a false disclosure of child abuse, a statement written onto another student's questionnaire. In these instances, it is reasonable to conclude that the written portion of these select few questionnaires had been sensationalized. At the same time, it could be presumed that any study of this nature-- questioning junior high students on their perceptions of school violence-- would generate responses from both victims as well as perpetrators. The nature of the comments written in the nine offensive questionnaires, in conjunction with the reasonable responses given to the Likert-type questions, supported the belief that these were indeed the perceptions of perpetrators of school violence. For this reason, they were not discarded from the study.

The study size and selection of the sample introduced a fourth limitation. Approximately 36% of the (108) total junior

high administrator population in Alberta were selected for the questionnaire. Of the 120,000 junior high students (data obtained from Alberta Education) in Alberta classes, 231 students in five junior high schools were selected. Therefore, while it may indeed be the case, it is not claimed that this sample is representative of the Alberta junior high school student population.

Finally, the schools for study were selected by the central office administration of the respective boards, the rationale of which was not shared with the researcher. The specific classes to which questionnaires were administered in each school were chosen by the school administrator, the rationale of which was also not provided. For these reasons, the sample cannot be considered to have been randomly selected.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited in three ways:

1. For purposes of convenience, the study involved students in junior high schools with grades 7, 8 and 9 of three districts located in the Edmonton and surrounding region for a period of one month in the Spring of 1995.
2. Only those administrators of junior high schools in the three schools boards that were studied, received mail-out questionnaires. Only those who were willing, responded.
3. The list of violent behaviors used in the questionnaire was generated by reviewing a study of students on school violence conducted in Toronto (Ryan, Mathews & Banner, 1993) as well as consulting a group of junior high school students

prior to the pilot study. It is felt that this consultative process resulted in a more comprehensive list of violent behaviors and one that the students could relate to.

Ethical Considerations

In March of 1995, a *Research Ethics Review Application* was submitted to the Department of Educational Policy Studies outlining the following: (a) the objectives and procedure of the study, (b) the nature of involvement of human participants, (c) a procedure to address anonymity and confidentiality issues. Having complied with due process, ethics approval was granted.

One week prior to data collection, students were verbally requested by the researcher to participate in completing the questionnaire. At that time they were apprised of the nature of the research and the requirements for their participation, as well as the option to not participate that would be made available throughout. A letter explaining the nature of the research, its potential value to education, and the estimated time for completing questionnaires was distributed to students and their parents for consent purposes.

On the day of the data collection, only those volunteer students who had returned a signed consent form, completed and submitted a questionnaire. Once again, students were told by the researcher that they could refuse to participate prior to, or during the time allotted for the study.

Participants were assured that the final research report would not identify any person, school, or school jurisdiction by

name. Questionnaires did not request any information that could potentially identify any participant.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into chapters based on specific topics. Chapter 1 contains an overview of the study, its purpose, significance, assumptions, limitations and delimitations. In addition, a definition of terms and a discussion of ethical considerations are provided.

A review of related literature appears in Chapter 2 focusing on the following: (a) the meaning of school violence, (b) the statistical trends related to youth violence, (c) findings of previous studies on school violence, (d) the legal and moral duties of educators to provide safe schools, (e) strategies that have been used to effectively deal with school violence.

In Chapter 3, the research method is reported, including data collection procedures, the research instrument, the data analysis methods used, validity and reliability of data.

Chapter 4 provides a summary of the data analyzed from the students' and administrators' questionnaires. In addition, the implications of the findings are discussed with regard to related literature as well as personal considerations.

Chapter 5 includes a summary, then discussions of implications of the study, conclusions and potential for future research. Chapter 5 concludes with a section titled: "Personal Reflections."

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature which is reviewed in this chapter is divided into topics as follows: (a)school violence as an emerging research topic, (b) redefining school violence, (c) the role of perception in assessing the extent of school violence, (d) constraints on reporting school violence, (e) the extent of the problem, (e) school violence and societal violence, (f) gender and age variables, (g) legal implications of school violence, and (h) a review of strategies to address school violence.

The themes discussed in this chapter were chosen to frame the context of violence as applied to schools, assist in identifying relevant trends, and offer possible explanations for emerging similarities or differences among the findings of this study.

School Violence: An Emerging Research Topic

During 1993, 93% of Canadian adults said that violence against staff and students in elementary and secondary schools was of concern. When ordering issues of educational concern, respondents ranked violence first overall (Environics, cited in MacDougall, 1993). A recent survey of British Columbia secondary students indicated violence and drugs were two of the most commonly cited weaknesses of public schooling (cited in BCTF, 1994).

Violence in schools has been of concern for over 30 years in the United States (Marvin, McCann, Connolly, Temkin, &

Henning, 1976). Whereas Canadian social institutions have focussed on the problem primarily in the past five years, Alberta has only recently begun formal dialogue on school violence (Alberta Education, 1993).

In the past 20 years, Offord (1994) is convinced that not only the amount of school violence has increased, so too has the nature of the violence changed. He further believes that fists have been replaced by weapons, knives, and guns. Michael Weeks, Director of the Oxford County Board of Education cautioned that "unless some remedial action is taken, in 5 to 8 years our secondary schools could resemble war zones" (cited in Alberta School Boards Association, 1994, p. 5).

Redefining School Violence

Trying to distinguish between youth violence and school violence committed by youth is problematic. The statistics that are gathered on either are very much dependent on the definition of violence; a definition that has expanded over the years to include more than crimes dealt with in youth court.

In a 1976 U.S study (Marvin et al.) school violence was broadly defined as "any event that significantly disrupts the education of students...vandalism, personal assault, gangs...intruders and weapons" (p. 16). The problem with framing violence in such narrow, legalistic terms is that it remains a law enforcement issue (Mawhinney, 1995). Broadening the definition to include physical and non-physical acts, harassment, verbal slurs and threats of injury (Jaffe, 1993),

recognizes that there are victims of many unindictable, deliquent behaviors.

At a recent Canadian Conference on Violence in Schools (1994), the context of violence was broadened even further to include "anything that denies human dignity and leads to a sense of helplessness and hopelessness" (attributed to Martin Luther King by Lalonde, 1994). For many, the meaning of school violence has evolved beyond definitions found in the Criminal Code. It encompasses "anything that affronts a child or teacher or staff member's ability to function in a safe, conductive learning environment" (Wiseman, 1993, p. 3).

The Role of Perception in Assessing School Violence

Johnson (1987) identified several key questions to consider in educational research: "...(c) how accurately do perceptions portray reality? and (d) are perceptions shaped by identifiable and commonly occurring factors?" (p. 209). Reviewing conclusions researchers have drawn on the topic of school violence should therefore take into account the role perception had in determining those views. For example, not everyone is in agreement with expanding definitions of school violence. West (1993) stated that such broad definitions of violence serve to distort and unduly escalate the "moral panic" associated with school violence discussions. Wayson (1985) suggested that much of the hysteria has come from grouping behavioral or discipline problems together with crime and violence. Furthermore, he challenged the assumption that

violence is a critical deterrant to effective learning in school.

A report by Wall, (1995) suggested that statistics which indicate increases in school violence, even in the broader context, are not indicative of what is truly occurring in Alberta schools, which are largely safer than the media and public believe. Wall contended that his data support Wayson (1985) who maintained that school violence is used as a term to elicit fear in communities, by self-serving groups of parents, teachers, and politicians to stir up mass hysteria and are therefore greatly exaggerated. Recent headlines (e.g., "Fear in the Halls", Calgary Herald) in Canadian newspapers (Stewart, 1995) seem to support those who suggest school violence is largely a product of media hype serving to inflame perceptions of a problem that has remained stable for years.

In Kasian's 1992 survey of teachers, (with the exception of weapons possession) no observable differences were found in respondents' recollections of increases in school violence over the past five years. Kasian hypothesized that violent incident rates have remained unchanged over the years and only appear to have escalated due to heightened awareness and increased attention directed at the topic of school violence.

Murdoch-Morris (1993) argued that regardless of whether there has been an increase in violence, staff and students must work diligently towards maintaining a peaceful school. Non-action was not an option and would be viewed as signaling a message to students that violent actions were condoned.

For Mathews (1994), the largest impediment to effectively dealing with school violence is not non-action, it is denial; "that code of silence that permeates the student and staff population and minimizes the true number of incidents that are taking place every day" (conference presentation, 1994). This silence can lead to as much as 50% under-reporting of school-based violence (Ryan, Mathews, & Banner, 1993).

Constraints on Reporting School Violence

The code of silence Mathews (1994) refers to among the student body, is primarily motivated by a real fear of reprisal (Heath, 1994). Children often feel peer pressure to accept their victimization or take matters into their own hands in the form of retaliation (Newark & Kessel, 1994).

Garofalo, Siegel and Laub (1987) found that some children may feel that adults are inept or disinterested in protecting them from bullies and therefore consciously choose to keep their victimization to themselves. Observations by Craig and Pepler (cited in Pepler & Craig, 1994) found that teachers were relatively unaware of bullying incidents and responded to approximately four percent of incidents observed by the researchers. Children themselves indicated that 22% of them would never tell their teacher that they had been victimized, whereas only 50% would occassionally tell.

Walker's study (1994) on weapons use in Canadian schools asked police to rank reasons for the reluctance of schools to report weapons. Of the thirteen possible answers, "denial or avoidance that a problem exists," "not recognizing there is a

problem," "the school was able to deal with issues themselves," "differences in educators' and police' philosophies" were the four most frequently top-rated factors (p.17).

Extent of the Problem

Many researchers and educators believe that over the past 20 years not only has the school violence increased, so too has the nature of the violence changed. For example, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, in its 1993 report (cited in MacDougall, 1993) agreed that violent incidents over the past five years were on the increase and added that the perpetrators were becoming younger.

Statistics Canada data (1994) provided by Day et al. (1995) indicated that "23% of all violent crime victims were teenagers between 12 and 19 years, double their representation in the 1990 Canadian population... 23% of those accused of violent crimes against younger teen victims were 12-15 themselves and a further were 16-19" (p.10).

With respect to the use of weapons, young people (aged 12 to 17) were more likely to "use firearms (5%) and knives/other cutting or piercing instruments (12%) than adults (4% firearms and 9% knives) (cited in Smith, Bertrand, Arnold,& Hornick, 1995, p. 4).

Statistics suggest that Alberta's youth are not immune to the violent crimes that were once thought to exist only in large urban provinces such as Ontario. In 1988, Alberta led the way in numbers of young people appearing in youth court. Of the total 12-17 year old population, offenders represented 4.6%. Minor

assaults, for example a punch or kick, represented 40% of all violent offence cases in youth court in 1990-91 (cited in Alberta School Boards Association, 1994).

Canadian data on the nature and extent of violent activites in schools is very recent and limited. The data that have been gathered suggest that physical and non-physical acts of violence are committed by students on a regular basis. Ryan, Mathews and Banner (1993) found that 29% of grades 6-9 students had been threatened, 31% bullied, and 16% beaten-up while at school.

The most recent statistics of youth school violence come from a study in Calgary's junior and senior high schools Smith, Bertrand, Arnold, & Hornick, 1995). Of the nine types of victimizations: "something damaged, something stolen, something taken by force, threatened, slapped or kicked, threatened with weapon, attacked by group/gang, someone exposed themselves, sexually touched against will;" something stolen (55.6%), something damaged (43.6%), threatened (42.3%) and being slapped or kicked (37.1%) were the most prevalent amongst students. With the exception of weapons threats and being attacked by a gang or group, all victimization rates were higher while at school than while not at school. Weapons possession was also highly correlated to fear of victimization; 31.7% of students who expressed a high degree of concern over being victimized at school also reported having had a weapon.

Walker's (1994) study on weapons use in Canadian schools found that 42% of police agencies polled reported seizing knives from youth aged 12 to 17 years within schools and on school

property. This figure increased from 35% reported the previous year. For the same time period, 74% of surveyed school authorities, up from 58% in 1992, representing sixty-nine school boards across Canada, reported seizing knives from students.

A recent Calgary study (Smith, Bertrand, Arnold, & Hornick, 1995) of students in 20 junior and senior high schools found that 2.6% of the 962 students surveyed reported having had a handgun at school within the past year. Interestingly, weapons possession was strongly correlated to victimization. Forty-nine percent of students who reported a high level of victimization also revealed that they had a weapon at school.

Smith, Bertrand, Arnold and Hornick (1995) also found a strong relationship between victimization and offenders. Over one half (52.2%) of students who indicated a high level of victimization, also reported substantial incidents of their own delinquency. The field of criminology has looked extensively at the linkages between victims and perpetrators, as well as the characteristics of chronic offenders. Caputo and Ryan (cited in Ryan et al., 1993) discussed a possible link between child victimization and later adolescent and adult offending, theorizing that continual victimization may lead to a perception by the child, that violence is a normal part of life.

School Violence and Societal Violence

Thirty-five percent of the criminal caseload in Canada is comprised of Young Offender Act violations and represent crimes that are committed both inside and outside of the school (Newark, & Kessel, 1994).

The violence observed in Canadian schools cannot be viewed in isolation from the violence prevalent in a society that has changed in many ways over the past decades. This generation of youth has faced an almost indifferent acceptance of violence: by the time a person is 18, he or she has viewed 28,000 murders on television; a woman is sexually assaulted every 6 minutes in Canada; the biggest users of pornography are boys between 12-18 years of age; four of every ten sexual assault victims are children, four are teens; of the 150,000 street children in Canada, 94% have been physically abused, 80% have been sexually abused.

Campbell's study (1993) reported a significant potential for the influence of media violence. The findings suggested that by the time children completed elementary school, television viewing had shown them 8,000 murders and over 100,00 acts of violence.

The Ledingham, Ledingham and Richardson report (1993) on "The Effects of Media Violence on Children," strongly implied a link between media violence and aggressive behavior among children. British researchers (Black & Newman, 1995) caution that there is no evidence to support that viewing violence on a screen alone will directly cause violent behavior. However, the use of aggression as a problem solving strategy is learned early in life and is a resistant to change. The media, among other factors, such as witnessing family violence or being a victim of school bullying, are all influences that reinforce the acceptability of aggression (Lantieri, 1995). For this reason,

Black and Newman urged parents to closely monitor their children's exposure to media violence.

It could be argued that school is simply a reflection of the violence that is seen and experienced in society. However, Smith et al. (1995) found that victimization rates were higher at school (81% at school and 69% elsewhere), thereby challenging some educators who contend that youth violence is a problem more prevalent in the larger community than in schools.

An Ottawa teacher's strike in 1992 provided an interesting statistic that would support the need to address violence in schools. When 25,000 students were unable to attend school the youth crime rate dropped substantially, despite community misgivings about the large number of young people "on the streets." The crime level rose again when the strike was over and students returned to school, and dropped once again during the summer months (Wiseman cited in Orbit, 1993, p. 3).

Gender and Age Variables

Ryan, Mathews, and Banner (1993) found in their survey of an Ontario middle school, that female and older students were more likely than male and younger students to report victimization of violence. At the same time, it was the male and younger students that personally experienced higher rates of victimization. A fear of retaliation and a belief that they could handle the situation unassisted, were primary reasons given by these students for their failure to report incidents.

A similar pattern emerged in the findings of Smith, Bertrand, Arnold and Hornick (1995). In their study of youth

violence in Calgary, victimization decreased in higher grade levels indicating that younger students were more likely to be victims. Of the 962 students who took part in the study, 84% of males and 79% of females reported experiencing victimization at school and more males than females reported delinquency.

Kasian's study of grades 8-12 students in Ottawa (1992) also found that more males than females experienced all violent behaviors, with the exception of sexual harassment. Physical conflict was most prevalent in grade 8 students, the least in grade 12 students.

Legal Implications of School Violence

School administrators' moral and legal obligation to provide violence-free schools are complex (Solomon, 1994). Pursuant to the Alberta School Act (Sec.15-e, 1988) educators must maintain order and discipline in their schools; effectively, they are bound to deal with an incident of violence in the school. Administrators may be found liable for negligence in supervision, for example for allowing violent acts to occur, especially if there is evidence of a student's violent propensities and no steps were taken by the administrator to intervene (Wenden v. Trikha (1991), 116 A.R. 81 (Alta. Q.B.)).

The Common Law standard of care owed to students by administrators, is that of a reasonably prudent or careful parent in similar circumstances (Keel & Goto, 1994). The options available for prudence and care are complex, involving both civil and criminal law, federal and provincial legislation.

The legal framework relevant to safe schools can be found in the *Criminal Code* 1985), the *Young Offenders Act* (1985), *the Constitution Act* (1982), the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), *the Alberta School Act* (1988), and *Common Law*.

A decision to follow provincial school act powers to expel a violent student for the protection of the student body, for example, can be challenged on the basis of depriving the offending student of the basic right to an education under the *Charter* (Doctor, 1994).

The legal framework recognizes not only the necessary steps to respond appropriately to violence, but also addresses the obligation for on-going strategies of prevention. The *Young Offenders Act* states that:

> ...young persons who commit offences require supervision, discipline and control, but, because of their state of dependency and level of development and maturity, they also have special needs and require guidance and assistance...

A Review of Strategies to Address School Violence

As continued research focuses more attention on the area of school violence, educators are recognizing the increased need to review the effectiveness of past practices. Strategies have increasingly recognized that effecting a reduction in school violence will require efforts at introducing pro-social behavior as much as suppression of delinquent behaviors. The American Psychological Association (cited in Day, et al., 1995) recommended that school boards revisit current programs and policies on behavior and discipline. These programs are centred on three key areas: prevention, intervention and response.

Prevention/Intervention

Some of the most beneficial strategies for reducing school violence have been in the area of preventative programs (Rock, cited in Violence Prevention, 1995). School curricula have successfully integrated the teaching of pro-social behavior such as listening, problem solving, peaceful conflict resolution and self control skills (Guetzloe in Day et al., 1995).

Increasingly, school boards are recognizing the need to develop conflict resolution programs for their staff and students (Wright in Orbit, 1994, p. 25). To date, however, few changes to traditional policies outlining behavior codes and consequences, have been noted in Alberta (Day et al., 1995).

Ideally, behavior codes should lead to intervention programs which reduce to zero the number of violent behaviors that already exist in a school.

This same national survey (Day et al., 1995) on school-based violence prevention policies reported that fewer than 20% of respondent school boards in Alberta had "early/ongoing identification (10%), aftermath programs (10%), procedures for policy/program evaluation (10%) ...screening curricula for violent content (0%)" (p. 66).

Response

Historically, policies have identified expectations of student behavior and listed the consequences if these expectations were not met. The behaviors typically included alcohol and drug abuse, theft, truancy, and disrespect shown towards teachers. As the term "violence" has broadened in

definition, policies are also expanding to include intimidation, bullying, threats, and harassment (Day, Golench, MacDougall, Beals-Gonzalez, 1995).

As Bareham and Clark (1994) pointed out, response to school violence should combine an obligation to provide for incident reporting, meaningful followup as well as a commitment to deal fairly and effectively with both the victims and the perpetrators. Response to school violence also requires a commitment to address codes of behavior and discipline policies from a sense of compassion, not punishment, fear or retribution (Heath, 1994).

Summary

Notwithstanding the limited amount of current quantitative research on the nature and extent of school violence, references were drawn from contemporary Canadian sources as much as possible in order to provide a contextually relevant picture of what is thought and known about the topic.

Specific studies conducted with Canadian students (e.g., Kasian, 1992; Ryan, Mathews, & Banner, 1993; Smith, Bertrand, Arnold, & Hornick, 1995) were not available until after the data for this research were collected. However, the information gained from a review of that research did provide direction for the analysis and interpretation of the findings presented in this study.

Reviewing the historical development of definitions of violence was deemed an essential first step in interpreting studies of school violence. The list of behaviors such

definitions encompass played a major role in the development of the instruments through which data on the nature and extent of violence were collected.

Although there is some disagreement (Wall, 1995; West, 1993), the prevailing view on defining school violence is that it encompasses both physical as well as verbal aggression. Within this context, both the nature and extent of violence in schools is considered by many researchers to be under-reported and underplayed (e.g., Walker, 1994; Heath, 1994; Pepler & Craig, 1994; Mathews, 1994). For example, Kasian (1992); Ryan, Mathews & Banner (1993); and Smith et al. (1995) found that victimization rates were higher for students in lower grades, and in particular, male students.

The use of weapons in settling disputes was reported to be increasing, (Walker, 1994; Smith et al., 1995) with knives as the preferred weapon by perpetrators as well as victims (for protection).

The consensus in Canada amongst educators (e.g., Ontario Safe School Task Force, 1994; Alberta Education, 1993; BCTF, 1994) researchers, (e.g., Smith, et al., 1995; Ryan, Mathews & Banner, 1993) and the public (e.g., Environics, cited in MacDougall, 1993) is that school violence is an escalating problem both in its nature and extent. What is not as readily agreed upon, are the root causes of this violence and who should be responsible for managing and reducing it in schools.

Although the Alberta School Act (Sec. 15-e, 1988) specifies that educators must maintain order and discipline in their schools, there is a view that school violence simply

mirrors societal violence and must therefore by addressed through a multi-disciplinary approach. Moreover, as Schmidt, et al. (1990) argued, schools cannot solve all of society's ills. The important role that schools play in influencing the lives of young people can not be disregarded, however. For this reason, a number of educators (e.g., Auty, 1993), researchers (e.g., Mathews, 1994) and police (e.g., Newark & Kessel, 1994) believe that schools must develop and expand policies and programs to reduce school violence. The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (Violence-free schools policy, 1994), the British Columbia School Trustees Association (Bareham & Clark, 1994) and the Alberta School Boards Association (MacDonald, 1994) have strongly encouraged educators to implement strategies of prevention, intervention and response to assist in dealing with the problem of school violence.

To date, the majority of school boards across Canada have not developed formal policies in the areas of early and on-going intervention or prevention (Day et al., 1995).

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHOD

In this chapter, matters related to the research method, including data collection, research instruments, procedures, data analysis methods, validity and reliability are discussed.

The Research Instruments

This study was exploratory in nature, given the limited amount of research conducted on Alberta students' perceptions of school violence. Its primary purpose was to develop the beginnings of an understanding of the issues through quantitative methods and explore areas for further research. This study did not seek to advance generalizations on the topic of school violence or more specifically, violence in Alberta's junior high schools.

Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire (Appendix A) solicited the following types of data: (a) personal data regarding the student's grade and sex, (b) data related to the types of violent behaviors the student had experienced and/or observed at school, (c) the perceptions of the seriousness of specified violent behaviorss, (d) perceptions the student had of the principal's and teachers' awareness of school violence, (e) the perceptions the student had of their personal ability to deal with specified conflict, (f) student perceptions of the conditions in which he or she would inform a teacher or principal about witnessing or being victim of specified violent

behaviors, and (g) an opportunity for the student to provide additional comments regarding school violence.

Administrator Questionnaire

The administrator questionnaire (Appendix C) requested the following types of data: (a) personal data regarding the number of years as an administrator, and as an administrator of that school; (c) the demographics of the school; (d) perceptions of the seriousness of specified violent behaviors; (e) data related to the types of violent behaviors the students had experienced at school;(f) the extent to which specified violent behaviors were considered a problem in the school; (g) a perception of students' satisfaction with the way victims and perpetrators of violence were dealt with; (h) how aware the principal felt he or she and the teachers were of violent activities in the school; (i) how confident the principal was that students inform staff about witnessing or being victims of specified violent behaviors; and (j) an opportunity to provide additional comments regarding school violence.

The Pilot Study

One grade 8 class in an urban K-12 school in the Edmonton region was selected on the basis of convenience. The demographic data indicated that the class represented a predominately white, middle-class population.

This pilot study had as its goals: (a) to explore unforeseen aspects of the data collection methods; (b) to explore the nature and level of interest from students and

administrators in the study of school violence; (c) to provide information about the strengths, weaknesses and concerns related to the questionnaires; (d) to determine if the student questionnaire would be too lengthy and intense for students to complete in the designated time; (e) to determine if data findings would lend themselves to statistical analysis.

All four goals were accomplished. After all questionnaires were returned to the researcher, the students were asked to provide comments and or suggestions on the usefulness and clarity of the questionnaire. Although several students indicated a preference for more open-ended, essay-type questions, the large sample size anticipated in the final study, would have made analysis of a large amount of open-ended questionnaire data a difficult task. The questionnaire was redesigned however, to include a larger area for students to respond to the one open-ended essay question at the end of the questionnaire.

In discussion with students participating in the pilot study, the questionnaire was determined to be understandable and thought provoking to the respondents. Only three typographical errors were brought to the researcher's attention.

Student questions for clarification were varied, difficult to anticipate and considered best addressed through researcher-student communication during the data gathering period. For these reasons no additional explanations were incorporated into the questionnaire instructions.

Although only one student remarked that the questionnaire was lengthy, the researcher sensed that due to the intensity,

energy and resolve that the students demonstrated in completing the questionnaire, it should be shortened if possible. For this reason, in the final study, of the ten possible behaviors students in the pilot study responded to as having experienced, "being spat upon" was removed in the second half of the survey (those questions pertaining to conditions for telling of an incident as a victim or as a witness). The decision was made on the basis that this was the only behavior consistently considered "minor" by students.

The researcher was overwhelmed with the students' enthusiastic willingness to participate in the pilot study, and their diligent completion of the questionnaire. Several students approached the researcher afterwards to express their appreciation for having had their opinions of school violence solicited. One student wrote on his survey, "wow, this is a huge topic."

Data Collection

A questionnaire was used to collect data from principals and students of selected junior high school students in the greater Edmonton area. The timeline, population, sample and data collection methods are described as follows.

Timeline

The timeline for data collection was as outlined below:

1. April , 1995: Pilot study;
2. May - June, 1995: Data collection;
3. June - August, 1995: Data analysis;

The Population

The respondent group included five junior high schools from the three participating districts. The central office administation of two of the three school districts selected the junior high schools that could be used for the study. No rationale was solicited or provided for the selection of these schools. The first principal contacted refused to participate in the study after receiving a copy of the student questionnaire. This individual stated that neither he nor the staff of [school name] would be interested in having the researcher "come into the school and have students answer those types of questions." The district's central office was again contacted to provide an alternate school.[1]

The Superintendent of the third district asked that the researcher contact all the junior high school principals and discuss which of them would be willing to participate. During this process, one administrator declined on the basis of having been "over-researched" in the past year. The administrator of the second school contacted agreed to participate. The reseacher received a telephone call from a third administrator regarding clarification of the administrator mail-out questionnaire that had been receieved. During the course of this conversation, the

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[1] In a telephone conversation with a researcher from the Central Toronto Youth Services who had been involved in studying school violence for several years, the author was advised that entry into schools to question students on school violence would be "fraught with obstacles...you will have to resort to near cloak and dagger methods...just realize that it is not a welcome topic from the view of administration...good luck."

principal asked if the researcher would be willing to include his school in the study; the offer was accepted.

A grade 7, 8 and 9 class and the principal were asked to participate in each school. Administrators of each school were requested to choose three classes, one of each grade 7, 8 and 9. The researcher was not advised of the reasons the selected classes were chosen. In School E, a grade 8 class was not selected to participate; in School B, two grade 8 classes were selected. Both administrators offered explanations of convenience in scheduling as rationale for their decision.

Participation rates varied amongst schools, largely dependent on the cooperation of school staff in reminding students to return their consent forms. It was noted that schools in which the principal demonstrated positive enthusiasm for the study of school violence, had the highest participation rates.

The Questionnaire Sample

The sample of students completing the questionnaire was dictated by three factors: a) school selection by district central administration; b) class selection by the schools' principals; c). individual student participation determined by signed and returned student and parental consent forms. Hence, the sample of students and principals was not randomly selected.

Although this sampling procedure weakens any case that could be made for generalizing findings to the entire population of junior high students in Alberta, the sampling procedures served the purposes of this exploratory study. A study seeking

to establish generalizations would have required a different sampling technique.

Questionnaires were mailed in early May to the 39 junior high school administrators of the 3 districts used in the student study. Because administrators whose schools participated in the study completed the questionnaire on-site, they were not included in the mailout.

Two follow-up telephone calls, one week apart, were made to remind administrators to complete and return questionnaires. At this time, five school secretaries advised the researcher that the administrator had received the questionnaire but decided not to complete it.

School-based Distribution and Collection of Questionnaires

The administrators of the pre-selected schools were requested by telephone contact to participate in the study. One principal refused on the grounds that he found the questionnaire and the topic to be irrelevant and offensive. The district provided the researcher with an alternate choice. Principals of the preselected schools who agreed to participate offered to provide the researcher with a grade 7, 8 and 9 class for one period at a pre-determined date to complete the questionnaire. One week before administering the questionnaire, students were verbally requested by the researcher to participate in study.

They were apprised of the nature of the research, the requirements for their participation, as well as the option to not participate that would be available throughout. A letter was given to the students with the request that they take it home

for consent purposes. Teachers volunteered to collect consent forms for the researcher.

On the day the questionnaires were administered, only those students who had returned a consent form signed by a parent or guardian were given a questionnaire. Three students had parents provide verbal consent over the telephone. Seven students without signed consent forms completed questionnaires. After these students informed the researcher of their lack of parental consent, their questionnaires were torn up and not used in the study. The student questionnaires took approximately 20-40 minutes to complete. Students were allowed to ask questions of clarification throughout the time alotted. With the exception of four classes, all students completed their surveys at a desk in silence. Four classes were administered questionnaires in the library, seated in groups. It was during one of these occasions that the nine questionnaires with offensive written comments were completed.

The Administrator of each participating school was apprised of the request to complete the questionnaire during the time that students were administered theirs. On the day of data collection, the administrator's questionnaire was left at the front office, and collected after the researcher was finished in the classrooms.

Mailout Distribution and Collection of Questionnaires

Identical school-based administrator questionnaires were mailed, accompanied by a covering letter to the 39 junior high schools of these districts used in the student study. The participants were requested to complete and return these questionnaires within two weeks of receipt. Three weeks after the original mailing date, telephone calls were made to all 39 schools, to remind those who had not completed their questionnaires to do so as soon as possible. At this time, five schools responded that they were not interested in participating in a study of school violence. Participation rates are listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Percentage Return Rate for Administrator Mailout Questionnaires

District	Number Mailed	Number Returned	% Success
1	27	15	55.5
2	9	4	44.4
3	3	3	100.0
Total	39	22	

Data Analysis

The primary goal of this study was to explore the perceptions of students and administrators of selected junior high schools as to the nature, extent, awareness and management of violent behaviors in their schools. Therefore, the data were analyzed so as to address the following purposes: (a) to summarize the data related to the types of violent behaviors students have experienced in school; (b) to summarize the

perceptions students have of the seriousness of each violent behavior; (c) to summarize the data related to the students' perceived level of observed and personally experienced violent behaviors in their school; (d) to summarize the data related to students' perceptions of the administrator's and teachers' awareness of school violence; (e) to explore the variables which influence students' decisions to tell a teacher or principal about witnessing or being victims of school violence; and (g) to compare student data to administrator data on the nature, extent and awareness of school violence.

Content and statistical analyses were used to interpret the data from the student and administrator questionnaires.

Statistical Analysis of the Questionnaire Data

A number of methods were used to analyze questionnaire data. First, frequency counts and percentages were derived for each question. Second, comparisons were made of responses based on grade and sex to determine if differences existed among groups: gender, student grade, students and administrators.

To test for significant differences amongst pairs of data e.g., male/female, administrator/students; t-tests were performed using SPSS Release 4.0 for Macintosh. Significant differences were determined at levels of $p<0.01$ and $p<0.001$ ($\alpha = 0.05$). Between-group as well as within-group means were compared using the SPSS ONEWAY Analysis of Variance (Norusis, 1990), in order to test for the null hypothesis that all of the groups have the same mean in the sample population.

Analysis of variance between grades used the Scheffe procedure of multiple comparisons, determining significance at $p<0.01$, $p<0.05$ and $p<0.001$ ($\alpha = 0.05$). This was done to determine which pairs of grades (7, 8 or 9) had significantly different means.

Content Analysis of the Responses to the Open-ended Question

Written responses were analyzed on the basis of emergent "themes" related to issues identified through the review of related research. Selected comments were used to enhance and supplement relevant statistical findings.

Interpretations of Findings

There were a number of findings from the student data that were difficult for the researcher to fully understand. Although it was not the intent to psychologically analyze student data, it was meaningful to attempt to better understand some of the students' responses. To this end, the researcher questioned a small group of junior high school students on the rationale behind their perceptions of the nature and management of school violence.

Validity

Shipman (1981) has cautioned that the use of one method of data collection can lead to "a one-dimensional snapshot of a very wide and deep social scene" (p. 147). Although multiple methods of data collection are often used to increase confidence in the validity of the data collected, this study was limited to

data collection by a questionnaire, due to constraints of time and access to students.

Fraenkel & Wallen (1990) suggest that the quality of the instruments used in research greatly influence the validity and usefulness of the inferences made from the data collected. These inferences must be appropriate, meaningful and useful. For this reason, several strategies were utilized to increase the validity of the research instrument: (a) 7 junior high students assisted in the development of the student questionnaire in language they considered appropriate for their age group; (b) the student and administrator questionnaires were pre-tested in the pilot study; (c) the researcher conducted a review of the relevant literature as well participated in conversations with fellow graduate students, principals, teachers and a superintendent to validate the study's clarity of purpose, method, and research instruments used.

Reliability

According to Gay (1992), the Likert-type scale questionnaire attempts to determine the beliefs, perceptions, feeling or attitudes of self, others, activities, and situations. As this study was not designed to determine the actual number and nature of violent incidents in each of the schools studied, the use of Likert-type questions was deemed an appropriate way to probe students' and administrators' perceptions on the topic of school violence.

The primary disadvantage of this type of research instrument is that it is difficult to ascertain "the degree to

which the subject's responses reflect his or her true attitudes" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 312). While statistical tests of reliability are available (e.g., test-retest), these were not applied primarily due to the exploratory nature of the study as well as scheduling constraints in recollecting data.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a summary of the data analyzed from: (a) the student questionnaires; (b) the administrator questionnaires, mail-out as well as those who participated in the on-site study. Students' and administrators' comments have been integrated where appropriate. In addition, implications of findings are outlined with regard to related literature as well as personal considerations.

The data were analyzed in relation to student perceptions of: (a) how safe they felt in school, (b) how they classified certain behaviors, (c) how effecively they could deal with conflicts, (d) the types of violent behaviors they have experienced at school, (e) the extent of observed and experienced violent behaviors in their school, (f) how aware their school principal and teachers were of violent behaviors, (e) the degree to which students were satisfied with the treatment of victims and perpetrators of school violence, (e) under what circumstances students inform teachers or their principal as victims or witnesses of school violence.

Demographics

A total of 231 students completed the questionnaire, 56% females (130) and 44% males (101). The data in Table 4.1 outlines the student participation rates as 87 grade 7 students (37%), 71 grade 8 students (31%) and 73 grade 9 students (32%).

Table 4.1. Frequency Distributions of Students who Participated in the Study by School, Grade and Gender .

School	Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 9		Total		Participation
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Rate
B	9	11	10	7	1	16	20	34	72%
C	9	15	14	18	4	6	27	39	64%
D	3	5	7	10	12	6	22	21	52%
H	2	12	3	3	3	5	7	20	38%
S	11	10	6	14	6	14	25	16	84%
Totals	34	53	33	38	34	39	101	130	

Students' Perceptions of Feeling Safe at School

In general, as data in Figure 4.1 suggests, students felt safe at school. There were no significant differences found between female and male students, or among grades in student responses to this question.

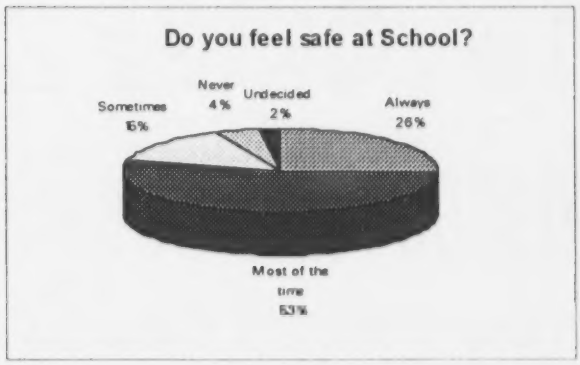

Figure 4.1 Students' response to feeling safe at school as a percentage. Students ranked feeling safe on a 5-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the time; 2= Sometimes; 1= Never; Undecided

Eighty percent of students felt safe "always" or "most of the time," whereas 19 % responded as "never" or "sometimes" feeling safe at school. A report by Wall (1995) suggests that

statistics which indicated increases in school violence, even in the broader context, are not indicative of what is truly occurring in Alberta schools. It would appear that the results of student responses in this study to the question "Do you feel safe at school?" support Wall's (1995) conclusion that Alberta schools are much safer than the public and media believes.

Approximately 34 (19%) of the students who provided comments on the questionnaire, wrote positively about their school, indicating that violence was not a problem. This number varied by school from a high of 28% in School C to a low of 9% in School B. These comments include:

> I think right now its [school violence] not a big problem because it really doesn't effect me. (grade 9 female)
>
> I don't think that violence is a big problem at our school. I've seen and heard about a few fights, but nothing major. (grade 8 female)
>
> School violence isn't really a problem in our school, except for the few odd people. (grade 7 female)
>
> I think that in this school violence is almost non-existent. However, racism is, I'm a victim of it and I don't like it. (grade 7 female)

A number of student comments (over 60% of the 75% who wrote comments), reveal concerns that cannot be easily ignored by the seemingly positive statistics:

> Elementary school I feel is pretty safe but junior high seems to be a big step and is much more dangerous. If junior high is this dangerous what is high school going to be like? (grade 8 male)
>
> It [school violence] has increased and more girls get involved. People are more tough and some people are scared of getting beaten up. (grade 9 female)

> I think school violence sucks because it makes people afraid to come to school. It makes people more self-conscious. You coordinate your wardrobe or do your hair differently just so you don't become a victim for being the way you are. (grade 9 female)

Grade seven student comments also suggest that Alberta schools may not be as safe a haven as Wall (1995) argued:

> I think it's not fair because alot of people get beaten up...
>
> I think school violence should be stopped before someone here is seriously injured.
>
> There is alot of violence in our school and some of the time no one is being caught for it.

Over 75% of students felt safe at school "always" or "most of the time." And yet, 45% provided comments that indicated personal concerns over school violence. Due to this possible incongruity between students' written comments and students' response to the question "Do you feel safe at school?," perceptions of school safety have been analyzed on many levels, as the following pages describe.

School Violence Experienced by Students

Survey question 3 asked students what they had experienced at school. The researcher was asked for clarification by several students, whether their response could be in the affirmative if "experienced" meant "experienced as a perpetrator" and/or "experienced as a victim." Students were told that the question should be interpreted as "experienced as victim or perpetrator." In order to better understand the statistical differences between both interpretations, additional questions (questions 7

and 8) were asked to probe the extent of victimization versus that of witnessed school violence. These findings are discussed later in this chapter.

Students were asked to indicate from a list of ten violent behaviors what they had experienced, either as victim or perpetrator, at school. Responses by students in different grades (see Table 4.2), indicate a number of significant differences: "punching, hitting, grabbing," "ethnic conflict" and "sexual harassment" being more prevalent amongst grade 8 students. These results are consistent with those found in the Ottawa study (Kasian, 1992) indicating higher levels of certain types of violent behaviors amongst grade 8 students.

Table 4.2. Percentage and Frequency Distributions of Students who have Experienced Behaviors by Grade.

Behavior	Grade 7 (n=87)		Grade 8 (n=71)		Grade 9 (n=73)	
	%	freq.	%	freq.	%	freq.
Fights	44.8	39	59.2	42	50.7	37
Threats with weapons	13.8	12	14.1	10	19.2	14
Verbal threats	66.7	58	71.8	51	60.3	44
Things damaged or stolen	60.9	53	64.8	46	63.0	46
Bullying	42.5	37	50.7	36	54.8	40
Punching, hitting, grabbing	40.2	35	62.0**	44	60.3	44
Sexual harassment	16.1	14	32.4*	23	23.3	17
Spitting	23.0	20	29.6	21	32.9	24
Teasing,swearing,name calling	79.3	69	85.9	61	86.3	63
Ethnic conflict	16.1	14	33.8*	24	27.4	20
Other[2]	1.1	1	2.8	2	5.5*	4

Students were asked to mark with a check (√) from a list provided, what they had experienced at school.
Significant difference at ** $p < .01$;* $p < .05$ ($\alpha = .05$)

[2] Students who marked "other" were also asked to specify the behavior. Responses provided were: "smoking", "taking drugs or alcohol", "burning someone's hair or the bottom of their pants with a lighter."

Gender differences, as data in Table 4.3 indicate were also found, with male students experiencing a higher percentage of "fights," "bullying," "punching, hitting, grabbing," "verbal threats" and "ethnic conflict." In all but "teasing, swearing, and name-calling," more males had experienced violent behaviors than did female students. These data support Jaffe (1993) who contended that violence in schools is not a gender-neutral topic. Ryan et al. (1993) also found that male and female students were subject to different forms of school violence; males experiencing more physical violence than did females.

Table 4.3. Percentage and Frequency Distributions of Students who have Experienced Behaviors by Gender and Total.

Behavior	Female (n=130)		Male (n=101)		Total (n=231)	
	%	freq.	%	freq.	%	freq.
Fights	35.4	46	71.3***	72	51.1	118
Threats with weapons	12.3	16	19.8	20	15.6	36
Verbal threats	60.0	78	74.3*	75	66.2	153
Things damaged or stolen	63.1	82	62.4	63	62.8	145
Bullying	36.9	48	64.4***	65	48.9	113
Punching, hitting, grabbing	40.0	52	70.3***	71	53.2	123
Sexual harassment	27.7	36	17.8	18	23.4	54
Spitting	28.5	37	27.7	28	28.1	65
Teasing,swearing,name calling	83.8	109	83.2	84	83.5	193
Ethnic conflict	17.7	23	34.7**	35	25.1	58
Other	3.1	4	3.0	3	3.0	7

Students were asked to mark with a check (√) from a list provided, what they had experienced at school.
Significant difference at *** $p<.001$; ** $p<.01$; * $p<.05$ ($\alpha = .05$)

Although the current findings are consistent in demonstrating significant gender differences, the percentages of affected students is higher than the 23% of males and 8% of female bullying victims found in the Pepler & Craig (1994) study. A total of 49% of students surveyed had experienced bullying, a number slightly higher than the 31% found by Pepler & Craig

(1994) and much higher than that found in Toronto (Ryan et al., 1993), Japanese (Hirano cited in Olweus, 1993), British (Smith, 1991) and Spanish (Ruiz cited in Olweus, 1993) schools.

Fifty-one percent of the students had experienced fighting, 53% grabbing, punching, hitting. In contrast, only 16% of students had reported experiencing threats with weapons; a finding that does not support Offord's (1994) suggestion that weapons have replaced fists in settling student disputes. Weapons in this study, however, were more prevalent than the 4% cited by Pepler & Craig (1994), 8% by Ryan, Mathews & Banner (1993), or 5% by Smith et al. (1995).

Data analysis and student comments indicate that weapons are a concern in certain schools more than others. For example, only 3.7% of School H students had indicated experiencing "threats with weapons," contrasted with 29% of students in School S. Several student comments also reflect differing views on weapons in schools:

> I know at least 10 kids at [school name] that carry knives for protection but never get caught for having them. (grade 8 male)
>
> ...popular people beat geeks up and I think people should start carrying weapons to protect themselves. (grade 8 female)
>
> I guess school violence is a large problem because most of my friends carry weapons and I know alot of self defense. (grade 8 female)
>
> I think there is alot of school violence around but everyone fights and has weapons. Kids enjoy it and its mostly just fun. (grade 9 female)
>
> Violence at my school is not a large problem, but I'm one to talk since I carry a f...in' blade. (grade 8 female)

In previous paragraphs, it had been mentioned that students were encouraged to answer the question: "What have you experienced at school?," from the perspective of victim and/or perpetrator. Written comments suggest that respondents were in fact a mix of victims and perpetrators:

> Alot of students are being bullied. attacked, and having racial comments towards them because they are different. (grade 7 female)
>
> I don't like school violence. I'm a victim of teasing. It makes me feel really bad. I'm one of the unpopular kids. (grade 7 female)
>
> I think part of the f---in' problems are from the Lebs and Italians. They think they run the f---in' school...there are so many fights after school because of them. Sometimes even bring a blade... (grade 8 male)
>
> They [teachers] should worry about me blowing everyone's brains out with my 9mm... I wish I had unlimited ammo so I could kill every single one of the f---in' Italians. (grade 8 male)

Students' Classification of Violent Behaviors

Students were asked to classify a list of ten behaviors as minor, major or undecided (see Table 4.4). Approximately 60% of the students classified "threats with weapons," "things damaged or stolen," "sexual harassment" and "ethnic conflict" as major or serious infractions. "Punching, hitting and grabbing" was considered a major behavior by over half of the students, and yet "fights" was ranked as minor by 56% of students.

Table 4.4. Percentage Distribution of Students who Classified Behaviors as Major or Minor Conflicts

Behavior	Percentage "Major"	Percentage "Minor"	Undecided
Fights	37.7	56.3	6.1
Threats with weapons	71.4	19.9	8.7
Verbal threats	30.3	61.9	7.8
Things damaged or stolen	63.6	30.7	5.6
Bullying	37.2	52.4	10.4
Punching, hitting, grabbing	51.9	44.2	3.9
Sexual harassment	71.9	21.2	6.9
Spitting	14.3	75.3	10.4
Teasing,swearing,name calling	30.3	64.9	4.8
Ethnic conflict	61.0	26.0	13.0

Students marked with a check(√) if they would classify behaviors as minor, or major conflicts, or were undecided.

Several students commented on an almost complacent acceptance of school fights:

> If someone is beating you up you have the right to beat them up. (grade 9 female)
>
> There are some fights at lunch or after school and people get hurt but I think the fights are funny and fun to watch. (grade 8 male)
>
> People shouldn't fight for no reason but fighting does solve problems for us so adults should just stay out of it, we can handle it ourselves. (grade 9 female)
>
> I think that school violence is everywhere and there's so much of it that it's normal to watch a fight...it's everyone's source of entertainment (grade 8 female).

No significant differences were found with respect to gender with the exceptions of female students classifying "sexual harassment" as more major than did male students ($p=.004$). Kasian's (1992) study of Ottawa students from grade 8-13 showed similar findings, with sexual harassment being rated a more serious behavior by female than male students.

Grade differences were only significant in the classification of "fights;" more grade 7 students considering "fights" major ($p=.016$) and "being spat upon," considered more major by grade 9 students ($p=.027$).

Students' Confidence in Dealing with Conflicts

Students were asked to indicate their ability to deal with specified conflict situations. Twenty-eight percent of students responded "never" to their ability to deal with "threats with weapons" ($\bar{x}$ = 2.26). Sexual harassment ($\bar{x}$ = 2.55), stolen or damaged property ($\bar{x}$ = 2.66) and ethnic conflict ($\bar{x}$ = 2.73) were rated lowest by students in their ability to deal with effectively. Slightly over one half of students "always" or "most of the time" felt that they could deal effectively with bullying ($\bar{x}$ = 2.79), fights ($\bar{x}$ = 2.74), and verbal threats ($\bar{x}$ = 2.91).

Gender differences were evident as the data in Table 4.5 suggest. In all but three situations (spitting on someone, ethnic conflict and sexual harassment), males indicated a significantly higher confidence in their ability to deal effectively with conflict. This is in support of Hart (1993) who maintained that male violence is learned and normalized within modern society.

Grade differences were not as pronounced as those between gender, with one exception: grade 8 students indicated a higher perceived ability to deal with "punching, hitting, grabbing" effectively (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.5. Extent to which Students Perceive their Ability to Effectively Deal with Conflicts in their School by Gender.

Behavior	Mean of Extent of Perceived Ability to Deal with Conflicts: Female (n=123)	Male (n=96)	p
Fights	2.58	2.96**	.001
Threats with weapons	1.98	2.60***	.000
Verbal threats	2.73	3.15***	.000
Things damaged or stolen	2.50	2.86**	.004
Bullying	2.64	2.96**	.008
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.59	2.98**	.002
Sexual harassment	2.36	2.81**	.008
Spitting on someone	2.68	2.88	.143
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.89	3.04	.220
Ethnic conflict	2.60	2.89	.051

Students ranked awareness on a 5-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the time; 2= Sometimes; 1= Never. Significant difference at *** $p<.001$; ** $p<.01$; * $p<.05$ ($\alpha = .05$)

Table 4.6. Extent to which Students Perceive their Ability to Effectively Deal with Conflicts in their School by Grade.

Behavior	Mean of Extent of Perceived Ability to deal with conflicts: Grade 7 (n=84)	Grade 8 (n=67)	Grade 9 (n=68)	p
Fights	2.73	2.79	2.72	.858
Threats with weapons	2.22	2.20	2.36	.612
Verbal threats	3.01	2.89	2.80	.306
Things damaged or stolen	2.49	2.71	2.81	.094
Bullying	2.84	2.78	2.74	.776
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.57	2.97*	2.79	.033
Sexual harassment	2.56	2.62	2.48	.804
Spitting on someone	2.64	2.84	2.87	.295
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.81	3.05	3.06	.146
Ethnic conflict	2.54	2.94	2.76	.092

Students ranked awareness on a 5-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the time; 2= Sometimes; 1= Never. Significant difference at *** $p<.001$; ** $p<.01$; * $p<.05$ ($\alpha = .05$)

The question asking students about their ability to deal effectively with conflicts did not probe into their methods for dealing with violent behaviors. However, several students wrote about using avoidance and coping with fear as alternatives:

> Sometimes in the morning coming to school or passing a different Jr high or high school I feel insecure. I try to walk by quickly or get to class. When someone tells me someone is out to get me. I get scared. I look around before I go outside and look inside the bathroom before I go. (grade 8 male)

> ...they punch you for no reason and attack you on a field for no reason. I can't defend myself or he'll get more of his friends that are tougher then mine. (grade 9 male)

I think that school violence should try to be stopped, because some people are afraid to even come to school, because they think they're going to be beaten up. (grade 8 female)

I think school violence is a big problem ...when one of my friends have been beaten up I'm afraid to come to school the next week or so...I was so f---ing scared that I'd be next and it would be my ass they were kicking. (grade 8 female)

Violence stops us from talking to people cause the more people you know the more likely you are to get in a fight. (grade 8 female)

I think people should start carrying weapons to protect themselves. (female grade 8)

Students' Perceptions of Teacher Awareness

Students did not perceive that their teachers and administrator were always aware of violent behaviors at school. Data presented in Table 4.7 suggest that the differences are selective, based on the specific behavior and to a lesser extent, gender differences which were also significant for "fights" and "threats with weapons."

Table 4.7. Extent to which Students Perceive their Teachers and Principal to be Aware of Behaviors in their School by Gender.

Behavior	Mean of Extent of Awareness		p
	Female (n=129)	Male (n=97)	
Fights	2.57*	2.33	.020
Threats with weapons	2.41**	1.95	.004
Verbal threats	2.27	2.05	.063
Things damaged or stolen	2.70	2.67	.810
Bullying	2.22	2.05	.122
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.23	2.18	.602
Sexual harassment	2.23	2.10	.434
Spitting	1.71	1.72	.902
Teasing, swearing, name calling	2.26	2.11	.164
Ethnic conflict	2.38	2.17	.168

Students ranked awareness on a 5-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the time; 2= Sometimes; 1= Never. * significance at $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$ ($\alpha = .05$)

Grade differences (see Table 4.8) were only significant in the following categories: "verbal threats;" "punching, hitting, grabbing; "sexual harassment;" "teasing, swearing, name-calling." Grade 7 students consistently responded that they felt

teachers were more aware than did students in either grade 8 or grade 9.

Table 4.8. Extent to which Students Perceive their Teachers and Principal to be Aware of Behaviors in their School by Grade.

Behavior	Mean of Extent of Awareness Grade 7 (n=84)	Grade 8 (n=67)	Grade 9 (n=68)	p
Fights	2.40	2.44	2.56	.389
Threats with weapons	2.35	2.02	2.19	.239
Verbal threats	2.46***	2.01	1.99	.000
Things damaged or stolen	2.76	2.77	2.53	.142
Bullying	2.27	2.12	2.03	.159
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.38**	2.21	2.00	.006
Sexual harassment	2.56**	1.94	1.96	.001
Spitting on someone	1.74	1.81	1.59	.280
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.33**	2.31	1.94	.004
Ethnic conflict	2.48	2.19	2.15	.115

Students ranked awareness on a 5-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the time; 2= Sometimes; 1= Never. * Significance at $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$, ($\alpha = .05$)

The following comments also reflect a belief that there is a gap between students' and teachers' awareness of school violence:

> I think that there is alot of conflict within our school. There is so much going on, and yet no one does anything about it. (grade 8 female)

> I think alot of things are not noticed by teachers, principals. (grade 9 male)

> Some things are so common that they are ignored...teachers don't care enough about name calling, ethnic fights, teasing and stealing. They only care if blood is spilled so they can't be charged. Name calling can be hurtful but nobody cares. (grade 8 female)

> Teachers should be more alert and aware of some of the categories so that they could help solve it[school violence]. (grade 9 male)

> I think the teachers could do more and not sit in the staff room [and] eat donuts and drink coffee they should look for more violence. (grade 7 male)

As indicated in the preceding comments, this perception by students often leads to frustration and a belief that violence is ignored.

The data in Table 4.9 clearly show a difference between student and administrator perceptions of the extent of school

violence. Without further analysis of student reporting of incidents, however, it is difficult to determine if these results confirm the contention by some researchers that violence is underplayed by school staff (Heath, 1994; Ziegler & Pepler, 1993) who are often unaware that it exists due to the failure of students to report incidents. Or perhaps, the problem lies as Mathews (1994) suggested, in an intentional underplaying of violence that actually is reported by students to their principal and teachers.

Table 4.9. Extent to which Students Perceive their Teachers and Principal to be Aware of Behaviors in their School as Compared to Administrators' Response to the Same Question.

Behavior	Mean of Extent of awareness		p
	Students (n=221)	Administrator (n=28)	
Fights	2.47	3.43***	.000
Threats with weapons	2.20	3.32***	.000
Verbal threats	2.17	2.89***	.000
Things damaged or stolen	2.69	2.79	.325
Bullying	2.15	2.71***	.000
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.21	2.82***	.000
Sexual harassment	2.17	2.87***	.000
Spitting	1.72	2.75***	.000
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.19	2.75***	.000
Ethnic conflict	2.28	3.18***	.000

Students and Administrator ranked awareness of violent incidents on a 5-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the time; 2= Sometimes; 1= Never; Undecided

* Significance at $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$, ($\alpha = .05$)

For example, the differences between perceived awareness of "threats with weapons" on the part of students and administrators (see Table 4.9) could support findings of 344 Canadian police (Walker, 1994) that some educators deny or avoid that a weapons problem may exist in their school. However, this difference could also be attributed to principals and teachers not being informed of weapons' threats by student victims and witnesses. The finding of this study indicate that over 50% of students victims, and one third of student witnesses would "never" or "sometimes" tell teachers or their principals about a

weapon's threat. In this study, denial or avoidance of a school weapons problem are not reasons supported to explain the statistically significant differences between students' and teachers' awareness of "threats with weapons" (see Table 4.9).

Student Victimization and Witnessing of School Violence

Students were asked to indicate what they perceived the extent of certain violent behaviors were at school, based on observation and personal experience (see Tables 4.10, 4.11).

Table 4.10. Percentage Distribution and Means of Students' Perceived Extent of Observed School-based Violence.

	Perceived Observed Problem %freq				Mean
	Very Big %	Big %	Little %	No Problem %	
Fights	13.4	31.6	50.2	4.8	2.54
Weapons	11.0	8.8	36.1	44.1	1.87
Verbal Threats	19.5	29.4	45.0	5.2	2.64
Theft/Vandalism	20.9	36.5	39.6	3.0	2.75
Bullying	16.6	39.3	36.7	7.4	2.65
Punching,hitting, grabbing	20.4	31.3	44.3	3.9	2.68
Sexual Harassment	11.0	17.1	36.8	35.1	2.04
Spitting on someone	4.9	16.8	49.6	28.8	1.98
Teasing, swearing, name calling	32.0	35.1	27.3	5.6	2.94
Ethnic Conflict	12.8	17.6	45.4	24.2	2.19

Students ranked extent of violent incidents observed on a 4-point scale; 4= A very big problem; 3= A big problem; 2= A little problem; 1= No problem.

The three highest ranking problems were: "teasing, swearing, name calling;" "theft/vandalism" and bullying. Contrary to the recent media hype (Stewart, 16 1995) "threats with weapons" was perceived to be a "little problem " or "no problem" by over eighty percent of student respondents.

Table 4.11. Percentage Frequency Distribution and Means of Students' Perceived Extent of Personally Experienced School-based Violence.

Behavior	Perceived Experienced Problem %freq				Mean
	Very Big %	Big %	Little %	No Problem %	
Fights	8.4	22.0	37.0	32.6	2.06
Weapons	6.6	4.0	31.4	58.0	1.59
Verbal Threats	15.8	20.6	43.0	20.6	2.32
Theft/Vandalism	12.7	23.1	44.5	19.7	2.29
Bullying	11.0	23.3	34.8	30.8	2.15
Punching, hitting, grabbing	11.6	21.3	38.2	28.9	2.16
Sexual Harassment	8.80	9.3	27.4	54.4	1.73
Spitting on someone	4.4	7.5	38.1	50.0	1.66
Teasing, swearing, name calling	20.6	24.6	46.1	8.8	2.57
Ethnic Conflict	10.8	11.3	30.2	47.7	1.85

Students ranked extent of violent incidents personally experienced on a 4-point scale; 4= A very big problem; 3= A big problem; 2= A little problem; 1= No problem.

Gender was a factor only in one category of observed violent behaviors (see Table 4.14). Female students observed "sexual harassment" to be a larger problem than did the male students. Females were consistent in that they also ranked "sexual harassment" as a bigger problem based on personal experience. Males ranked only the problem of "fights" as a bigger problem based on their personal experience (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12. Students' Perceived Extent of Personally Experienced School-based Violence by Gender.

Behavior	Mean of Personally Experienced violence		
	Female (n=129)	Male (n=97)	p
Fights	1.94	2.22*	.022
Threats with weapons	1.59	1.59	.986
Verbal threats	2.28	2.36	.517
Things damaged or stolen	2.30	2.27	.794
Bullying	2.05	2.28	.082
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.10	2.23	.340
Sexual harassment	1.94	1.45***	.000
Spitting	1.71	1.60	.297
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.57	2.56	.948
Ethnic conflict	1.78	1.94	.257

Students ranked extent of violent incidents on a 4-point scale; 4= A very big problem; 3= A big problem; 2= A little problem; 1= No problem. * Significance at $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$, ($\alpha = .05$)

There were no significant differences in students' perceptions of the extent of violence vis-à-vis their personal experiences. However, based on personal observations, grade 7 students considered "verbal threats" to be a bigger problem than did students in either grade 8 or 9. This is an interesting finding in that data from question show that significantly more grade 8 students had personally experienced "verbal threats;" "punching, hitting, grabbing;" "bullying;" "ethnic conflict;" and yet did not consider these behaviors as "big" or "very big" problems (see Tables 4.13, 4.15).

Table 4.13. Students' Perceived Extent of Personally Experienced School-based Violence by Grade.

Behavior	Mean of Personally Experienced violence			p
	Grade 7 (n=84)	Grade 8 (n=67)	Grade 9 (n=68)	
Fights	2.01	2.19	2.00	.414
Threats with weapons	1.59	1.62	1.57	.931
Verbal threats	2.39	2.40	2.14	.176
Things damaged or stolen	2.24	2.40	2.23	.479
Bullying	2.21	2.06	2.15	.622
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.08	2.21	2.18	.689
Sexual harassment	1.62	1.77	1.81	.452
Spitting on someone	1.69	1.59	1.71	.614
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.62	2.69	2.40	.154
Ethnic conflict	1.72	2.04	1.81	.134

Students ranked extent of violent incidents on a 4-point scale; 4= A very big problem; 3= A big problem; 2= A little problem; 1= No problem. * Significance at $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$, ($\alpha = .05$)

One possible explanation for this difference could be that, although grade 8 students experience more, they have been conditioned to have a higher tolerance for violent behaviors and therefore do not consider them to be a big problem. The Ryan et al. (1993) study found similar trends, hypothesizing that as students get older they begin to interpret violence as a "normal" part of their school experience. Several student comments would support this view:

I think we get used to "bad stuff" because it happens so often. (grade 9 male)

I've seen so much of it [school violence] that it's hard to tell what's a problem and what isn't. (female grade 8)

Violence is a part of this world and most people have come to accept that and deal with it by taking self-defense courses and carrying weapons. I'd like to see how you try and change the way people in the world today think. (female grade 8)

Table 4.14. Students' Observed Extent of School-based Violence by Gender..

Behavior	Mean of Observed violence Female (n=129)	Male (n=97)	p
Fights	2.62	2.43	.058
Threats with weapons	1.91	1.82	.502
Verbal threats	2.66	2.61	.669
Things damaged or stolen	2.77	2.73	.719
Bullying	2.68	2.61	.486
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.74	2.61	.251
Sexual harassment	2.25***	1.77	.000
Spitting	2.07	1.86	.051
Teasing,swearing,name calling	3.02	2.83	.126
Ethnic conflict	2.17	2.22	.687

Students ranked extent of violent incidents on a 4-point scale; 4= A very big problem; 3= A big problem; 2= A little problem; 1= No problem. * Significance at $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$, (α =.05)

Table 4.15. Students' Observed Extent of School-based Violence by Grade.

Behavior	Mean of Observed violence Grade 7 (n=84)	Grade 8 (n=67)	Grade 9 (n=68)	p
Fights	2.59	2.56	2.45	.529
Threats with weapons	2.03	1.81	1.72	.109
Verbal threats	2.89**	2.45	2.51	.001
Things damaged or stolen	2.87	2.72	2.64	.181
Bullying	2.67	2.50	2.77	.158
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.75	2.58	2.71	.431
Sexual harassment	1.97	2.10	2.07	.663
Spitting on someone	2.01	1.94	1.97	.864
Teasing,swearing,name calling	3.05	2.89	2.85	.340
Ethnic conflict	2.07	2.40	2.13	.076

Students ranked extent of violent incidents on a 4-point scale; 4= A very big problem; 3= A big problem; 2= A little problem; 1= No problem. * Significance at $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$, (α =.05)

Data found in Tables 4.16 and 4.17 show differences between students' perceived Extent of "observed" versus "personally experienced" school violence. Considering violent behaviors to be more problematic in school on the basis of observation rather than personal experience would support Mathew's (1994) belief

the majority of students are not involved in violent activity and are "passive observers of violence in schools" (p. 39).

Section 2 of the student questionnaire asked students to indicate under what circumstances they would inform a principal or teacher about witnessing or experiencing victimization of school violence. If more students witnessed violence than were victims of school violence and many of these violent activities were never reported, the gap between administrators'' and students' awareness of incidents could be better understood. The following section analyzes the data from these questions.

Table 4.16. Comparison of Students' Perceived Extent of Personally Experienced School-based Violence versus Observed Extent of School Violence.

Behavior	Mean of Extent of Problem Observed	Experienced	p
Fights	2.55	2.06***	.000
Threats with weapons	1.86	1.59***	.000
Verbal threats	2.64	2.32***	.000
Things damaged or stolen	2.75	2.29***	.000
Bullying	2.67	2.14***	.000
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.68	2.16***	.000
Sexual harassment	2.05	1.73***	.000
Spitting	1.99	1.67***	.000
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.95	2.57***	.000
Ethnic conflict	2.19	1.86***	.000

Students ranked extent of violent incidents on a 4-point scale; 4= A very big problem; 3= A big problem; 2= A little problem; 1= No problem.

* Significance at $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$, ($\alpha = .05$)

Table 4.17. Percentage frequency Distribution of Students who Felt Behaviors were "very big" or "big" problems in their School Based on Personal Experience vs. Observation.

Behavior	Personal Experience "very big" or "big" problem %	Observation "very big" or "big" problem %
Fights	30.4	45.0
Threats with weapons	10.6	19.8
Verbal threats	36.4	49.3
Things damaged or stolen	35.8	57.4
Bullying	34.4	55.9
Punching, hitting, grabbing	32.9	51.7
Sexual harassment	18.1	28.1
Spitting	11.9	21.7
Teasing,swearing,name calling	45.2	67.1
Ethnic conflict	22.1	30.4

Students ranked behaviors on a 4-point scale; 4= A very big problem; 3= A big problem; 2= A little problem; 1= No problem.

Students' Management of School Violence

Students were asked to complete a series of questions in tabular format, framed to examine circumstances under which they would take responsibility for informing an adult (teacher or principal) of a violent incident that they had witnessed or were victims of. The variables were: (a) the type of violent behavior; (b) the relationship to the perpetrator as a witness or as a victim; (c) the relationship to the victim as a witness; (d) whether the victim, perpetrator or witness was older, younger, female, male, popular, unpopular, physically larger, physically smaller; (e) whether others were witnessing the victimization or not.

Regardless of their relationship to, or characteristics of the victim or perpetrator, 35% of students responded that they would "never" tell if witnessing violent behaviors. When including "sometimes," this number increases to 70%. There are some notable differences, regarding sexual harassment, and threats with weapons, which had larger percentages (approximately 40%) of students that would "always" tell as victims or witnesses (see Figures 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5). This number is slightly reduced to 30% for ethnic conflict. These numbers are comparable to the Ryan et al. (1993) study which found a total of 38% of all students who indicated that they had been victimized and yet did not report the incidents.

Students were most "undecided" about reporting sexual harassment (7.3%) and ethnic conflict (8.8%). Interestingly, students also responded that teachers were least aware of sexual

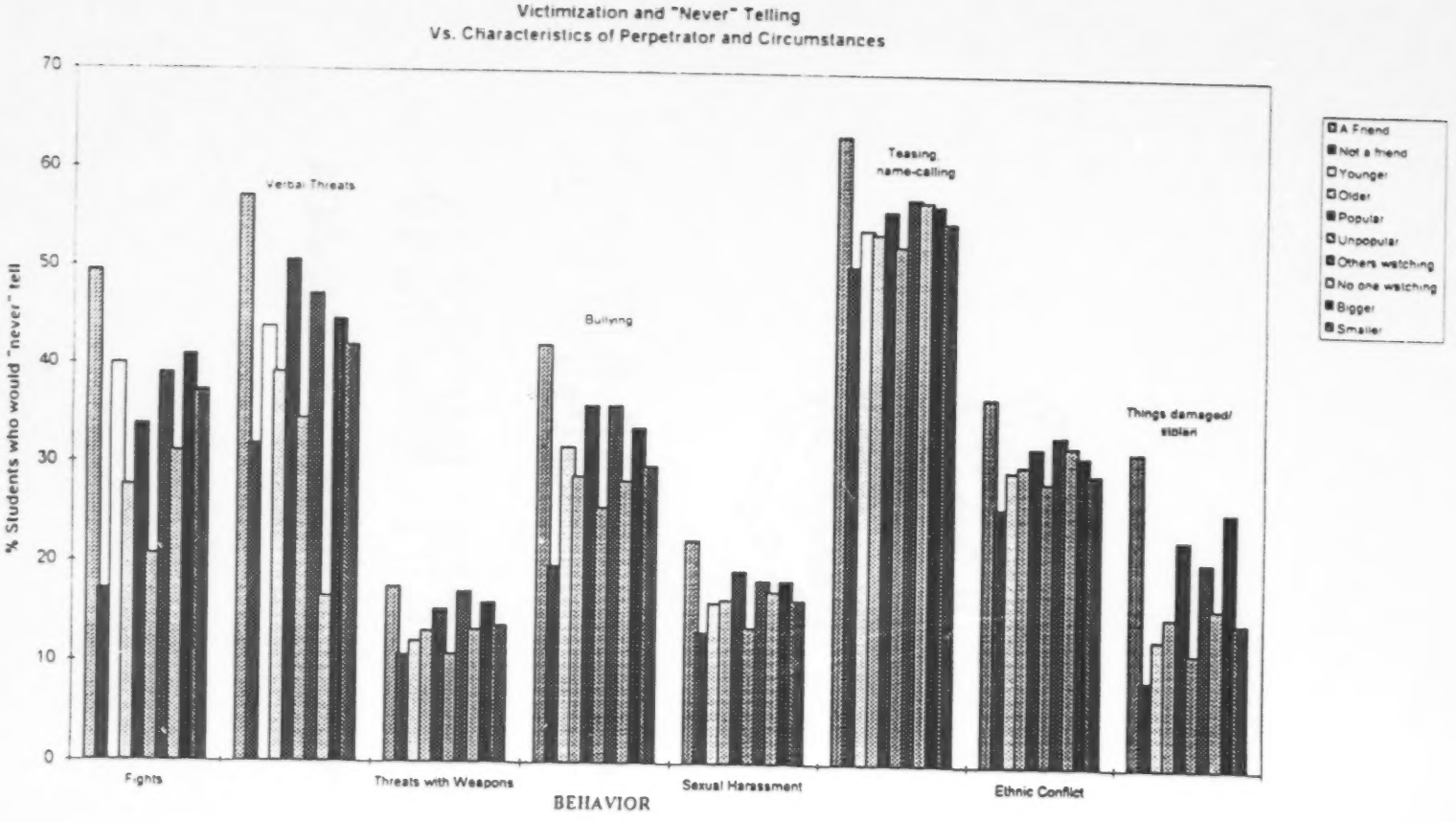

Figure 4.2. Students were asked to mark conditions in which they would tell a teacher about witnessing a violent act.

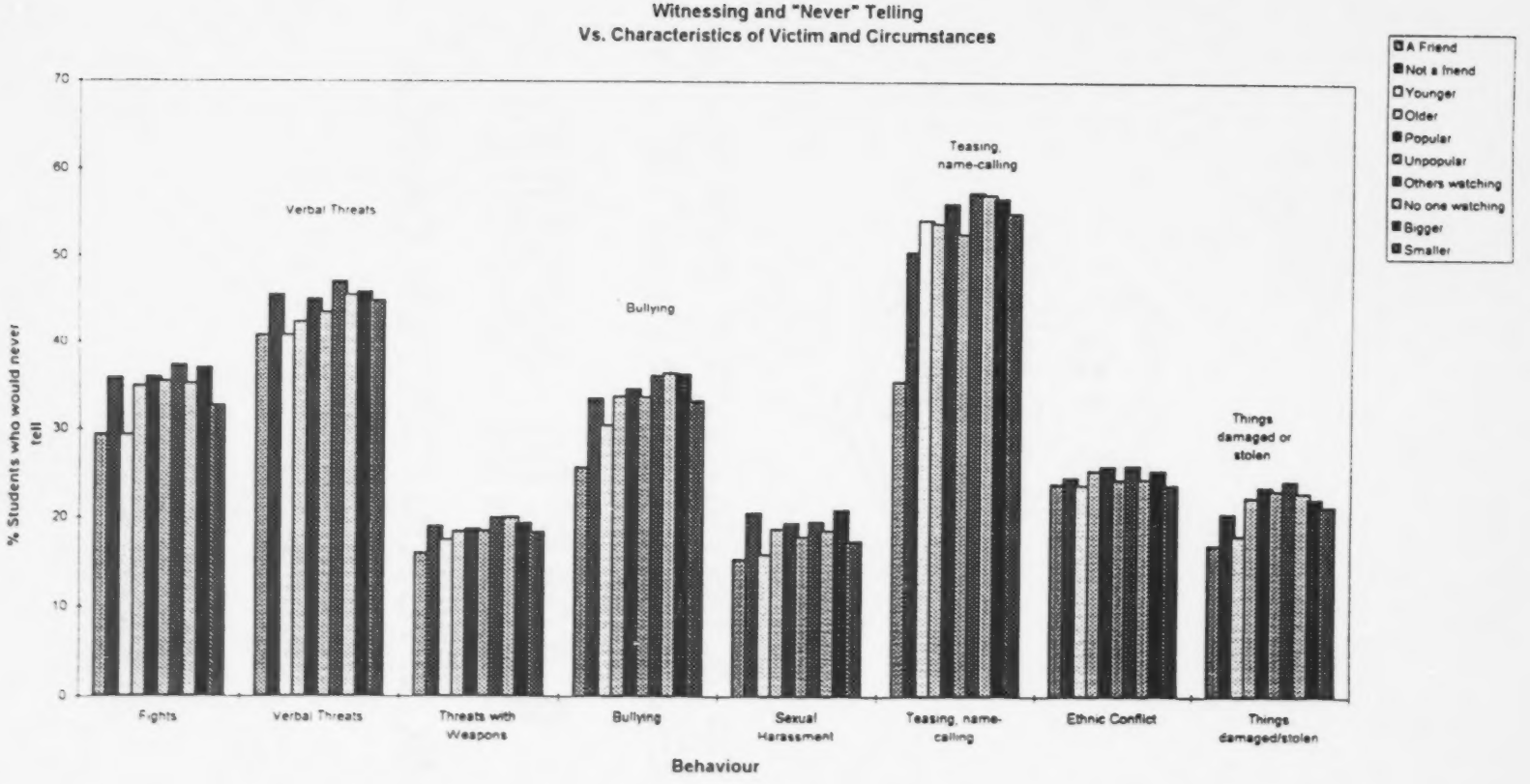

Figure 4 3. Students were asked to mark conditions in which they would tell about being a victim of a violent act.

harassment (see Table 4.9) and victims were not dealt with effectively. Students responded that teachers were largely aware of ethnic conflict (see Table 4.9) and at the same time, victims as well as perpetrators of ethnic conflict were considered to be dealt with effectively (see Tables 4.18, 4.19).

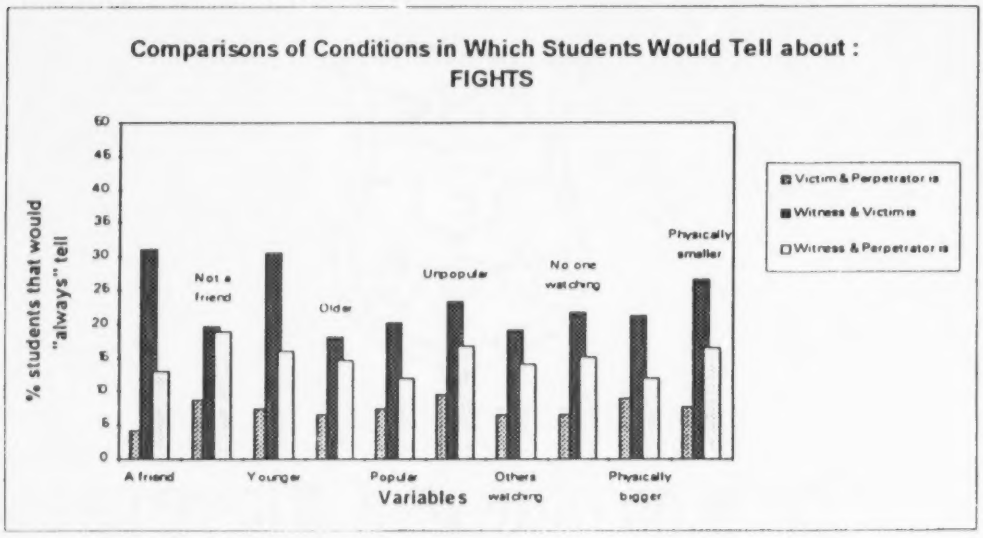

Figure 4.4. Students were asked to mark with check(√) conditions in which they would "Always", "Sometimes", "Most of the Time" or "Never" tell a teacher or principal about being victim or witnessing a fight.

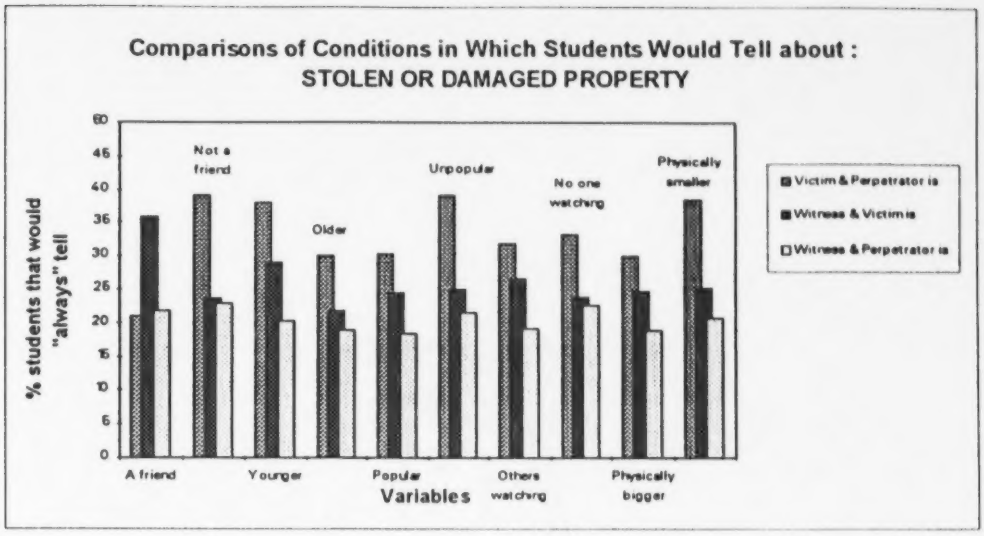

Figure 4.5. Students were asked to mark with check(√) conditions in which they would "Always", "Sometimes", "Most of the Time" or "Never" tell a teacher or principal about being victim or witnessing stolen or damaged property.

A number of students commented on several reasons for their failure to report witnessing or being a victim of school violence. One of the most common themes expressed related to fear of retribution; a finding consistent with other studies (e.g., Ryan et al., 1993; Kasian, 1992):

> Kids are scared to rat on other kids because they will get the shit kicked out of them. This is wrong. I wish that things would change. (grade 9 male)
>
> I have seen the victims and witnesses who had told on the person making the fight, who have been beaten up for it. (grade 7 female)
>
> Fights are really brutal and nobody tells because then they'll get beaten up. (grade 9 female)

Student Satisfaction with Treatment of Victims and Perpetrators

Students were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the treatment of victims and perpetrators of

violence in their school (see Tables 4.18, 4.19). Student perceptions were significantly different from those of administrators (see Tables 4.20, 4.21).

Table 4.18. Percentage Distribution and Means of Students' Satisfaction with the Treatment of Victims.

	% Satisfaction with Treatment of Victims				Mean
	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	
	%	%	%	%	
Fights	9.0	31.6	46.7	12.7	2.37
Threats with Weapons	25.4	26.0	24.9	23.7	2.53
Verbal Threats	12.1	25.1	39.7	23.1	2.26
Theft/Vandalism	13.0	24.0	34.1	28.8	2.21
Bullying	8.2	26.9	40.4	24.5	2.19
Punching,hitting, grabbing	12.5	27.4	40.9	19.2	2.33
Sexual Harassment	19.5	21.3	27.2	32.0	2.28
Spitting on someone	6.9	18.3	39.4	35.4	1.97
Teasing, swearing, name calling	10.4	26.9	36.3	26.4	2.21
Ethnic Conflict	19.4	21.7	30.3	28.6	2.32

Students expressed their satisfaction with the treatment of victims on a 4-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the Time; 2= Sometimes; 1= Never; Undecided

There were no significant differences noted by gender. Grade differences were found only in student satisfaction with the treatment of perpetrators, not victims. Grade 7 students were happier with the way perpetrators of "threats with weapons," "things damaged or stolen," and "ethnic conflict" were treated.

Table 4.19. Percentage Distribution and Means of Students' Satisfaction with the Treatment of Perpetrators.

	% Satisfaction with Treatment of Perpetrators				Mean
	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	
	%	%	%	%	
Fights	11.8	39.5	30.5	18.2	2.45
Threats with Weapons	30.2	23.6	30.2	15.9	2.68
Verbal Threats	9.2	28.0	36.2	26.6	2.19
Theft/Vandalism	15.4	26.6	30.4	27.6	2.23
Bullying	7.6	27.5	40.3	24.6	2.18
Punching,hitting, grabbing	11.8	31.1	42.9	14.2	2.41
Sexual Harassment	22.5	24.9	23.7	29.0	2.41
Spitting on someone	9.1	23.7	36.0	31.2	2.11
Teasing, swearing, name calling	8.3	26.4	38.0	27.3	2.16
Ethnic Conflict	20.7	32.6	23.9	22.8	2.51

Students expressed their satisfaction with the treatment of perpetrators on a 4-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the Time; 2= Sometimes; 1= Never; Undecided

Table 4.20. Extent to which Students and Administrators indicate Satisfaction with the Treatment of Victims of School Violence.

Behavior	Mean of Extent of satisfaction with the Treatment of Victims: Total Students (n=221)	Administrators (n=28)	p
Fights	2.37	3.14***	.000
Threats with weapons	2.53	3.52***	.000
Verbal threats	2.26	3.00***	.000
Things damaged or stolen	2.21	3.00***	.000
Bullying	2.19	2.93***	.000
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.33	2.96***	.000
Sexual harassment	2.28	3.23***	.000
Spitting	1.97	2.79***	.000
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.21	2.86***	.000
Ethnic conflict	2.32	3.10***	.000

Students and Administrator ranked awareness of violent incidents on a 5-point scale; 4= Always; 3= at p<0.05; ** p Most of the time; 2= Sometimes; 1= Never; Undecided
* Significance <0.01; *** p<0.001, (α =.05)

Table 4.21. Extent to which Students and Administrators indicate Satisfaction with the Treatment of Perpetrators of School Violence.

Behavior	Mean of Extent of Satisfaction with the Treatment of Perpetrators: Total Students (n=221)	Administrators (n=28)	p
Fights	2.45	3.21***	.000
Threats with weapons	2.68	3.38***	.000
Verbal threats	2.19	3.07***	.000
Things damaged or stolen	2.29	3.07***	.000
Bullying	2.18	3.07***	.000
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.41	3.00***	.000
Sexual harassment	2.41	3.09***	.000
Spitting on someone	2.11	2.91***	.000
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.16	2.89***	.000
Ethnic conflict	2.51	3.20***	.000

Students and Administrator ranked awareness of violent incidents on a 5-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the time; 2= Sometimes; 1= Never; Undecided
* Significance <0.01; *** p<0.001, (α =.05)

For the most part, students were less pleased with their school's response to violence than were the administrators. A number advocated changes to the Young Offenders Act, more severe punishments for perpetrators, a focus on societal violence and a fairer treatment of victims:

> If you can help get school violence like bullying out it will feel safer except that often you will tell on someone they will want to fight ...so you have to protect the victims. (grade 8 male)

> The teachers need to be more strict with worse punishments. I know my brother causes some trouble and he does it because he can get away with it. (grade 8 female)

> I think that the kids should be punished more because of their bad behaviors...I think that the law should get involved in certain situations, because when bad stuff happens to you, it doesn't just blow over, its with you forever. (grade 8 female)

> The first thing that must be done is getting rid of the Young Offender Act. It is too lenient and it gives kids the idea that no one can touch them and that they can do whatever they want because they're protected by this Act. (grade 8 male)

> Sometimes the principal never does anything. I was threatened by alot of popular people, that is why I never want to be popular. (grade 8 female)

> There should be more open discussions about it [school violence].(grade 8 female).

> If you want to help us out you should focus on violence at home and what kind of parents you get. Because if a kid is messed up in the head he doesn't care what the punishment is going to be. (grade 9 male)

It is interesting to note that not all students recommended increased intervention on the part of school staff. In fact, several students suggested that teachers "mind their own business" and leave students to cope with violence on their own terms:

> I guess school violence is a large problem, because most of my friends carry weapons...I don't really want anything done about school violence. I think this is the way that people learn how to stick up for themselves in real life. Violence itself is a part of this world, and most people have come to accept that and deal with it. (grade 8 female)

> Fighting does solve problems, problems for us so adults should just stay out of it we can handle it ourselves. (grade 9 female)

> I think you should just let the kids deal with it because they're in junior high already, they know how to take care of themselves. I think the teachers and principal should keep their noses out of kid's business. (grade 7 female)

> Nothing will happen to you if you have backup like tough friends or older brothers. If someone does something get your backup or connections and get him beaten up even if hospitalized. (grade 7 male)

Results of Administrator Mailout Questionnaires

Twenty-eight junior high school administrators completed a questionnaire, representing both public and separate school districts. Demographic data are represented in Table 4.22.

Table 4.22. Demographic Data of Administrator Respondents

School District	Public	Separate		Urban	Rural
	27	7		27	1
Student Population	**<250**	**251-500**		**501-1000**	**>1000**
	4	14		9	1
Years as Administrator	**< 2**	**2-5**	**5-10**	**>10**	
	2	3	7	16	

Analysis of variances between administrators' and students' questionnaire responses showed significant statistical differences as summarized:

1. Administrators perceived school violence was less a problem than students did (see Table 4.25).
2. Administrators considered students more capable of dealing effectively with "threats with a weapon," but less capable in the categories of "verbal threats" and "teasing, swearing, name calling" (see Table 4.23).
3. Administrators perceived students were more satisfied with the treatment of victims and perpetrators of violence (see Tables 4.20, 4.21).
4. Administrators felt that they and their staff were more aware of school violence than did students (see Table 4.9).

5. Administrators were more confident of students informing school staff about witnessing or being a victim of school violence (see Table 4.24).

Administrators and students did not differ significantly in their responses from one another in their perceptions of: (a) how safe students felt at school; (b) how much of a problem weapons threats and spitting on someone were at school; (c) teacher awareness of theft and vandalism.

A comparison of responses to the classification of behaviors was purposely omitted due to an obvious misinterpretation of the meaning of the question on the part of the administrators. For example, several responded that "threats with weapons" were "minor." It is believed that a number of administrators considered the question as asking how prevalent these behaviors were.

Although administrators considered their own schools as relatively violence-free, several comments pointed to their taking the topic of school violence seriously:

> If we do not take immediate and severe action, then we are giving a message that it [school violence] is not serious. By our response we demonstrate the degree of acceptability...school violence does affect learning and should not be tolerated.
>
> Bullying and threats elevate to violence of the highest order.
>
> Take a stand that students who seriously contravene the law and school regulations will lose their right to a public education. The safety of the majority far outweighs the rights of the serious violators.

Of the comments received, 19% suggested a community-based resolution; 26%, a need for a greater awareness of school violence; 31% advocated greater consequences for offenders; 23%

of respondents sought a move towards a zero tolerance of school violence and 42% felt solutions lay in more student rules and clearer behavior expectations.

Table 4.23. Extent to which Administrators and Students Perceive Students' Ability to Deal with Conflicts Effectively.

Behavior	Means of Extent of students' ability to deal with conflict: Total Students (n=231)	Administrator (n=28)	p
Fights	2.74	2.59	.227
Threats with weapons	2.26**	2.90	.006
Verbal threats	2.91	2.50**	.001
Things damaged or stolen	2.66	2.75	.510
Bullying	2.79	2.64	.394
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.77	2.68	.480
Sexual harassment	2.55	2.82	.081
Spitting	2.77	2.87	.633
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.96	2.71*	.024
Ethnic conflict	2.73	2.91	.406

Students and Administrator ranked students' ability to deal effectively with conflicts on a 4-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the time; 2= Sometimes; 4= Never. * Significance at $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$, ($\alpha = .05$)

Table 4.24. Extent to Which Administrators and Students Perceive Students would Report Victimization.

Behavior	Means of Extent of Students' Reporting of Victimization: Total Students (n=231)	Administrator (n=28)	p
Fights	2.74	3.18	.227
Threats with weapons	2.26**	3.00	.006
Verbal threats	2.91	2.50**	.001
Things damaged or stolen	2.66	2.75	.510
Bullying	2.79	2.64	.394
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.77	2.68	.480
Sexual harassment	2.55	2.82	.081
Spitting	2.77	2.87	.633
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.96	2.71*	.024
Ethnic conflict	2.73	2.91	.406

Students and Administrator responded on a 4-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the time; 2= Sometimes; 4= Never. * Significance at $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$, ($\alpha = .05$)

Table 4.25. Extent to Which Administrators and Students Perceive the Observed Extent of School Violence

Behavior	Means of Extent of Observed Extent of School Violence		
	Total Students (n=231)	Administrator (n=28)	p
Fights	2.55	2.18*	.021
Threats with weapons	1.86	1.79	.648
Verbal threats	2.64	1.21***	.000
Things damaged or stolen	2.75	1.96***	.000
Bullying	2.67	2.15**	.003
Punching, hitting, grabbing	2.68	2.11***	.000
Sexual harassment	2.05	1.64**	.004
Spitting	1.99	1.68	.428
Teasing,swearing,name calling	2.95	2.29***	.000
Ethnic conflict	2.19	1.46***	.000

Students and Administrator responded on a 4-point scale; 4= Always; 3= Most of the time; 2= Sometimes; 4= Never. * Significance at $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.01$; *** $p<0.001$, ($\alpha = .05$)

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, PERSONAL REFLECTIONS, CONCLUSION

The following chapter provides a summary of the findings presented in the preceeding chapter. Theoretical and practical implications are also outlined together with the potential for future research, and personal reflections.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of students and administrators with respect to the nature, extent, awareness, and management of violent behaviors in their schools. This purpose was pursued through a questionnaire study of 231 students and 28 administrators representing junior high schools in central Alberta.

The enthusiastic response of students who provided data pointed to their genuine interest in the topic of school violence. After completing their questionnaires, several students approached the researcher to express appreciation for having had their opinions of school violence solicited. One student wrote on the survey:

> Getting our input and our ideas and opinions was really a good idea. Not many people want our opinion. Thanks.

From all indications, the topic of school violence is relevant to this age group, (13-15 year olds) which dominates the junior high school student population.

Administrators who participated in the school-based study also showed interest, although of a different nature. During conversations with the researcher after the school administered

questionnaires were completed, administrators expressed genuine sympathy and support for the study of school violence. At the same time, administrators participated in the study with trepidation. Concerns were expressed, for example, that participating students might cast an uncomplimentary light on their school:

> I'll be very interested to see what my kids say. We have the odd problem, nothing serious... school violence isn't a problem here.
>
> You know how teens at this age are, always challenging, pushing our buttons... it would not surprise me if some of them blew things out of proportion on their surveys.
>
> Kids may think we [the staff] don't know what's going on, but we have a pretty sharp eye on things. We know pretty well everything that they're up to, even when they think otherwise.

Although only a small percentage of Alberta's approximately 120,000 junior high school student population was represented, many of the key findings of this study were consistent with those of other Canadian researchers (e.g., Ryan et al, 1993; Kasian, 1992; Smith et al., 1995; Hart, 1993).

The specific findings of the study all relate to the general research question which was "what are perceptions of students and administrators of Alberta's junior high schools with respect to the nature, extent, awareness and management of school violence. From the list below, numbers 1 addresses the subproblem of "how safe students felt at school." Numbers 6, 7, 16, 17 address the subproblem of "whether or not students perceived their school as an environemnt of violence." The subproblem regarding "what do students perceive to be the nature

of the problem?" was addressed by numbers 2-5, 8, 9, 10, 15, 18. "What are the circumstances under which students would inform an adult of a violent incident?" is answered in numbers 11 to 14.

1. A majority of students responded that they felt safe at school, always or most of the time.
2. Students reported observing more violence than personally experiencing it; the highest observed behaviors being "teasing, swearing, name calling," "things damaged/stolen," and "punching, hitting grabbing."
3. "Teasing, swearing, name calling," "verbal threats," and "things damaged/stolen" were the behaviors students indicated they personally experienced to be most prevelant; "threats with weapons," the least.
4. Over one half of the students were dissatisfied with the way victims of school violence were treated, in particular the victims of "bullying," "things damaged/stolen," "teasing, swearing, name calling" and "sexual harassment."
5. Students were least satisfied with the way perpetrators of "teasing, swearing, name calling," and "bullying" and sexual harassment were treated.
6. The majority of students classified "sexual harassment," "threats with weapons" and "things damaged/stolen" as major behaviors.
7. Female students indicated that they were becoming increasingly more involved in violent behaviors.
8. School violence was not a gender neutral topic, and affected male and female students differently.

9. Student confidence in staff awareness differed between grades; grade 7 students more confident than either grade 8 or 9 students that staff were aware of school violence. Students considered staff least aware of "sexual harassment" and the most aware of "things damaged/stolen," "fights," and "ethnic conflict."
10. "Threats with weapons" was considered the least observed or personally experienced problem by students, a behavior they considered teachers relatively unaware of, the type of conflict situation they could not effectively deal with and an incident they would most often report as victims or witnesses.
11. Student victims and witnesses of school violence were unlikely to report such to the degree that school staff presumed they would.
12. Witnesses of school violence were more likely to report incidents to teachers if there were no other witnesses present.
13. Students would report victimization more readily if the perpetrator was not a friend, was younger, physically smaller, unpopular, and no one else was watching.
14. The highest percentage of students undecided about whether to report witnessed violence were those who witnessed sexual harassment and ethnic conflict.
15. More male students indicated that they were able to deal with conflict situations than did female students.
16. Over 50% of students had personally experienced fights, stolen or damaged property, punching, hitting and grabbing

at school, 23% of the students had experienced sexual harassment and 15% threats with weapons.

17. Students commented on their frustration with the lack of teacher response to violence, a belief that little could be done to reduce this violence, a desire for more effective discipline of perpetrators and better awareness and treatment of victims on the part of teachers.
18. Individual school differences were most pronounced in students' responses to the extent of observed violence and their perceptions of teacher awareness.

Administrators perceptions were markedly different from students in a number of key areas:

1. Administrators felt students were more capable of dealing effectively with conflict, especially "threats with weapons" and "ethnic conflict."
2. Administrators considered the extent of most violent behaviors at school to be less than students did; the most prevelant being "teasing, swearing, name calling," "bullying" and "fights."
3. Administrators were more confident of their own and their staff's awareness of school violence, especially "fights," "threats with weapons," and "ethnic conflict."
4. There was a belief by administrators that students were generally satisfied with the manner in which victims of "threats with weapons," "fights" and "sexual harassment" were treated. This was consistent with students' responses, except in the case of "sexual harassment."

5. Administrators responded that students' satisfaction was greatest with the treatment of perpetrators of "threats with weapons," "fights" and "ethnic conflict;" consistent with student responses.
6. Administrators presumed that more students would inform school staff of witnessing school violence, especially "ethnic conflict," "sexual harassment" and "verbal threats."
7. Administrators responded that students would generally report victimization of "verbal threats," "threats with weapons" and "sexual harassment."

The question asking "Do you feel safe at school?" elicited as positive a response from students as did the similar question posed to administrators ("Do your students feel safe at school?").

Although the data collected in this study suggested that a majority of students generally felt safe at school, reponses to more probing questions provided an expanded perspective of what students perceived to be occuring in their schools. For example, although 79% of students felt safe "always" or "most of the time," over one-half of male students had experienced physical forms of violence (e.g., fights, bullying, punching, hitting, grabbing), verbal threats and theft or damage of property. One-fifth of male students indicated that they had been threatened with a weapon at school. Sexual harassment was experienced by over 25% of female students, whereas ethnic conflict affected one-third of male respondents. Despite the fact that only 4% of students responded that they "never" felt safe at school, 20% of students observed weapons and over 50% considered bullying to be

"very big" or "big" problems; thus indicating that observing violence did not influence perceptions of "feeling safe."

For the majority of questions, student responses were significantly different from those of administrators. In many cases, these differences in perceptions of the nature, extent and management of school violence could have been attributed to students intentionally not reporting their victimization; administators were seldom informed. Fear of retribution was a common explanation provided but certainly not the only consideration in students' failure to report incidents of violence. The relationship of the victim to the perpetrator, the witness to the victim or perpetrator and whether others were watching the incident were also contributing factors in students' willingness to report school violence.

Students were moderately satisfied with their schools' manner of dealing with perpetrators of violence, often expressing a preference for victims taking matters into their own hands in the form of retaliation. The treatment of victims was deemed less satisfactory than that of perpetrators, reinforced by a belief that teachers were largely unaware of violent activities at school.

Implications

Although there have been several recent individual school and district studies conducted across Canada (e.g., Kasian, 1992; Ryan, Mathews & Banner, 1993; Smith, Bertrand, Arnold, & Hornick, 1995), there is still much to be learned regarding students' perceptions of the nature, extent, and management of

school violence. For the most part, previous work (e.g., BCTF, 1994) has focussed on determining teachers' perceptions of whether or not youth violence in schools has escalated over the past number of years.

Undoubtedly, such information is useful and plays a role in understanding the issues from the perspective of those entrusted with maintaining "order and discipline" in a school (Alberta School Act, Sec. 13-f & 15-e, 1988). However, as Hochberg (cited in Johnson, 1987) and Litterer (1973) cautioned, one of the weaknesses of having only fragmentary information is that " individuals are frequently obliged to make perceptual assumptions and hold personal expectations which lead them to perceptions that diverge from reality and from those of other witnesses" (cited in Johnson, 1987, p. 210).

The findings presented in this study indicated that student and administrator perceptions of school violence did differ significantly in many aspects. Several implications arise from becoming aware of this "perception gap," the most obvious of which is the need for continued research in the field of school violence.

On a similar vein, if current practices were developed on the basis of administrator or teacher perceptions and assumptions of students' perceptions of school violence, how effective can these practices be? If, as indicated in the findings presented in this study, students are not satisfied with what teachers perceive to be effective consequences for bullies, a positive outcome could be an evaluation and possible modification of prevailing policies and practices governing

student discipline. In their 1995 survey, Day, Golench, Macdougall & Beal-Gonzalez found that fewer than 20% of school boards in Alberta had alternatives-to-suspension programs (a common punishment for repeat offenders e.g., chronic bullies). In light of some of the comments from both students and administrators in this study, it would thus appear advantageous for boards to consider the merit of pursuing alternative and more effective consequences for perpetrators of violent behaviors, such as bullying.

Students expressed an even greater dissatisfaction with the treatment of victims of school violence, in particular victims of bullying and sexual harassment. A number of salient comments were provided by students expressing their feelings of frustration related to their belief that little could be done to change positively the anxieties and fears that are part of actual or expected victimization. Unfortunately, aftermath suppport services which are designed to "address the trauma experienced by victims and witnesses of violent acts" (Day, et al., 1995, p. 191) do not exist in any of the surveyed boards in Alberta. As well, not one recommendation that applied to victims was offered by administrators who participated in this study.

Policies designed primarily to provide a list of consequences for perpetrators of inappropriate behaviors ignore the relationship researchers are finding (Smith, et al., 1995; Mathews, Caputo & Ryan, 1993) between students experiencing high levels of victimization and later demonstrating their own delinquency. In support of this contention, a number of students expressed a preference for "taking matters into [their] own

hands" through retaliation, if faced with victimization. In this regard, it would be interesting to determine if increasing the effectiveness of response to victims of school violence would substantially reduce the number of incidents.

With regards to specific incidents of violence, a substantial amount of Canadian research has been devoted to the study of weapons in schools. The findings from this study suggest that weapons were considered a small problem by students and administrators. Most often, weapons were carried for self-protection rather with intent to cause harm. Students in this study rated the use of weapons as a serious offence that they would report as either victim or witness of. Furthermore, students indicated a high level of satisfaction with the way victims and perpetrators of weapon threats were dealt with by school administration. As regards the 231 students in this study, therefore, extensive efforts to address weapons would not be as useful or relevant as educating students on sexual harassment, an activity students considered teachers largely unaware of, victims of which were not dealt with effectively and, which students indicated reluctance to report as witnesses or victims.

In summary, this study highlighted the need to identify and resolve differing perceptions students and administrators have on the nature, extent and management of junior high school violence. Analysis of the data together with a review of related literature provided a reference point from which to advance from exploring students' and adminstrators' perceptions of school

violence to future research that seeks to identify and reduce constraints to providing students with violence-free schools.

Areas for Further Research

This study focussed on the perceptions of junior high school students and administrators as to the nature, extent, awareness and management of violent behaviors at school. Further comparative studies on school violence could be conducted on the perceptions of teachers, support staff and parents through similar questionniares.

Individual school differences were noted in the findings of this study. It would be worthwhile to explore the effects of cultural, economic, social and administrative differences among these schools that may have contributed to differences in the nature and extent of school violence.

The configuration of the junior high schools used in this study was grade 7, 8 and 9. Grade differences were noted in responses provided to many of the questions (e.g., grade 7 students were more confident of their teachers' awareness of school violence.) It may be worthwhile to investigate schools with various grade configurations (e.g., grades K-9 and 6-8) in order to determine if different student age groupings within a school significantly alter student perceptions of school violence.

Much has been said in the literature regarding the "code of silence" (Mathews, 1994) that exists amongst staff and students which underplays the true nature and extent of violence in schools. The results of this study suggest that the nature of

this "silence" is multi-faceted. Administrators do not simply avoid or deny that a problem may exist. In many cases, students are simply electing not to report their victimization. The findings of this study indicated that fear of retribution was only one of a number of contributing factors in students' failure to report incidents of violent activity. Probing the factors which most influence students to take responsibility for informing adults (teachers, administrators or support staff) of violent incidents they witness or are victims of at school may help to expand theories regarding the moral dilemmas, fears and challenges faced by those students who are victims or witnesses of school violence. Likewise, it would be interesting to explore further the nature and extent of this "code of silence;" who else knows what and is not telling whom and why?

Future research questions could look at which variables most increase student reporting of both observed as well as personally experienced violence (e.g., treatment of victim, treatment of perpetrator, increased staff supervision, perceived seriousness of the behavior, relationship to the perpetrator). Such knowledge would provide direction for redesigning current school practices and policies that may no longer be effective in the prevention and response to violence

Prior to the study, the researcher was challenged by a number of educators as to the reliability of collecting data directly from students. They wondered whether students could be credible informants. Given that the findings of this study were consistent with those found through similar research across

Canada (e.g., Kasian, 1992; Ryan, Mathews & Banner, 1993) there is reason to suggest that in fact, students can be credible informants. To alleviate concerns regarding the reliability of student data, it is recommended that future studies use triangulation[3] (e.g., interviews, direct observation) to further explore students' experiences of school violence.

Personal Reflections

The following is an analysis of the findings presented in this thesis from a personal perspective. These views are an integration of personal beliefs and opinions formulated from a review of relevant literature, past experiences, as well as reflections on the findings of this study.

Challenges for Schools

Undertaking to study the problem of school violence is not an easy task. Dr. Mathews, one of a number of professionals across Canada who have been sounding the alarm on school violence, finds the task often daunting and discouraging. We as adults would simply not accept such conditions as exist for an increasing number of students in our schools. "Imagine being racially taunted, or insulted because of your body size, sexual orientation or accent. Imagine being shoved up against a wall, being knocked to the ground, or being attacked by a group of colleagues who take your jacket or sweater or shoes as a trophy" (1994, p. 38).

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[3] The term "triangulation" is used as defined by Borg & Gall (1989) to define a method of "using several different kinds of data-collection instruments... to explore a single problem or issue" (p. 393).

Does there exist a "code of silence" that serves to downplay the true extent of school violence or is there as West (1993) argues, an overstatement of a low-key problem motivated by political winds? At first glance, it may appear as though only a small minority (4%) of the students in this study were affected by school violence to the extent that they "never" felt safe at school. However, if this number is found to be indicative of provincial trends, four percent of the approximately 120,000 junior high school students in Alberta translates to over 4800 students. If we include the students who responded that they felt safe at school "sometimes," this number increases to 22,800 students (4% plus 15%)!

It is certainly not my intent to stir up mass hysteria or elicit fear, as Wayson (1985) and Wall (1995) accuse many people of attempting to do when discussing school violence. At the same time, it is difficult to ignore the potential implications of the findings presented in this thesis.

One of these findings points to a marked difference in students' and administrators' perceptions of the magnitude and nature of violence in schools. If these differing views are generated by an under-reporting of school-based, who is not reporting what and why?

Several possible explanations are offered, primarily as a result of this study. Students are not always confident in their ability to respond effectively to certain behaviors. Moreover, they are often undecided about whether to classify the behavior as a major or minor offence (e.g., punching, hitting, grabbing). Very often, as the students indicated, they are reluctant to

report incidents of violence from a real fear of reprisal. Perceptions of ineffective consequences or the perceived lack of teacher awareness and concern are additional factors which exert pressure on students to accept victimization and develop alternate strategies such as taking matters into their own hands through retaliation.

Lack of awareness among staff, together with students being unwilling to report episodes of violence seems a "recipe" for the kind of "code of silence" Mathews (1994) speaks of as so often distorting knowledge of the extent of school violence.

How is it possible to break this code of silence and work towards solutions? At the very least, there needs to be an acknowledgement that school violence does exist and that often, its nature and management is perceived quite differently by students and administrators. Second, schools must recognize that they have a legal and moral duty to deal effectively with violence in schools, regardless of its root and underlying causes.

Boards must be provided with a clear understanding of how safe or unsafe their schools are. Questions such as those used in this study could be asked of staff and students in order to explore whether or not there is a problem of school violence and the nature and extent of whatever problems do exist. Staff must be encouraged to speak freely to the realities of what is occurring in their schools, without fearing that this will lead to reprisals.

In some ways, teachers and administrators are faced with an almost impossible task. The elected school board and the

public expect that their educators maintain violence-free schools. Therefore, any initiative taken by the schools to reduce violence is often perceived by the community as a failure of administrators to have "maintained order and discipline" as legislated by the School Act. Quite often, boards and the public assume that their schools are already at the optimum in terms of student safety. Such pressure to maintain a positive image constrains administrators' motivation to request resources for school violence reduction. Effectively, any movement to address violence on the part of school staff is seen as an admission that a problem exists.

In many ways, it is the differing perceptions (e.g., media, public, teachers, students) of the nature and extent of school violence that perpetuates the "code of silence" and influences response. As stated by Johnson (1987), "perceptions shape human attitudes and behavior; their impact is pervasive and unavoidable" (p. 206). Perceptions are also developed and shaped by many factors, including societal, cultural and personal values. Although it is defensable to attribute violent behaviors in schools to a combination of causes, the danger lies in "perception bias" or "conflict of perceptions" (Johnson, p. 217) leading to inaction. For these reasons, our politicians, and our public must be prepared to applaud those who ask for research, policies or programs that will effect a reduction in the extent of violence in their schools.

School boards must actively pursue their obligation to provide schools that are safe communities of learning by encouraging and empowering their staffs to identify the nature

and extent of a problem that unfortunately arrived in our schools. Such strategies should be divided into three areas: response, intervention and prevention.

Response

Response to school violence combines an obligation to provide for incident reporting and meaningful follow-up as well as a commitment to deal fairly and effectively with the victims and the perpetrators. Response must be fair, compassionate, yet consequential. The success of any process to deal effectively with school violence will depend largely on a common understanding of expectations and limits of tolerance.

Ontario, for example has gone to great lengths to adopt a "Violence-Free School Policy" (1994), which communicates a zero-tolerance philosophy on the part of the Ministry of Education. Zero tolerance is not a focus on punishment and it is not premised on "fixing bad kids."

Zero tolerance suggests a philosophy that sets limits, by clearly articulating to students and staff that there are consequences for violent behavior. As indicated by students themselves, there is a growing desire for movement in this direction. Students in the study wrote: "kids need stricter rules," "more consequences for bad behavior," and "worse punishments for those who cause trouble because they know they can get away with it."

In its application, zero tolerance will only be effective if it is two-sided and equally applied. Therefore, it becomes just as intolerable for a student to utter a racial slur, or a

group of boys to whistle and sexually harass a girl, as it is for a staff member to walk by and ignore it.

Intervention

Ideally, intervention programs should reduce to zero the number of violent behaviors that already exist in a school. In order to achieve this goal, the first requirement is to break the "code of silence" and identify if a problem exists.

For principals, this may mean a concerted effort to "get in touch" with what their students are experiencing; a survey of students such as the one used in this study, is often a useful first approach. The antecedent in uncovering the nature and extent of school violence is that a climate exist within which staff have the support to resist the political pressures of their community to maintain a good public image at all costs.

Intervention programs focus on the coordination and on-going assessment of available community resources such as police liaison officers, social services, counsellors, community youth programs. In his study on youth gangs, Mathews (1993) reported that the overwhelming conclusion of all participants (youth workers, police officers, youth gang members, school administrators, parents) was that "little progress can be made [on youth gang violence] until school officials acknowledge the problem" (p. 59).

The Ontario Violence-Free Schools Policy (1994) describes intervention as a two step process beginning with an early-identification practice aimed at identifying those children that are at risk of being perpetrators and/or victims. After

identification, the focus would be on helping those children develop appropriate social skills.

Initiatives may also include support programs that are developed for students who require temporary withdrawal as a result of suspension. The most common reason for major student suspensions in 1991 was "conduct injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others in the school" (cited in MacDougall, 1993). Traditionally, disciplinary measures have involved the removal of a student for violent behavior. Increasingly, students themselves are urging educators to adopt positive, rehabilitative measures that will teach the offending student alternatives to violence and effect a safer school upon his or her return. Participating in community service or school fundraising are examples of constructive discipline that students themselves suggest would be beneficial:

> Maybe they'll [perpetrators] realize that they are a useful part of the school community, too, as opposed to being outside or separated from the school community, in a classroom marked Detention Room.
> (Student cited in Polanyi, 1994, p.11)

Violence Prevention

One of the best investments we can make is in prevention programs, rather than simply spending dollars on treating violent offenders (Wright, 1994). Prevention programs begin with an understanding of those elements that make a school safe. Hill and Hill, (1994) found that a safe school has a sense of being and purpose,and the students feel a part of a community whose membership is known and accepted. Safe schools typically have programs that teach students how to deal with anger and how to mediate conflict. In safe schools, discipline is consistently

applied, behavior standards are known, staff are involved and there is zero tolerance of verbal and physical violence.

Strategies aimed at prevention have included: the development of positive behavior programs that recognize the exemplary acts of students, resources that enable teachers to organize extra-curricular activities to promote a team environment amongst students, student involvement in behavior plan formulation, initiation of school programs that recognize community service as an integral contribution by students, curriculum that teaches students the skills needed for peaceful and co-operative problem solving.

Preventative strategies must also involve a commitment by parents and their community to promote clear and consistent behavior standards; behavior not tolerated in the classroom cannot be condoned in hockey arenas, soccer fields, baseball diamonds, corner stores, or malls, for example. School violence can only be eliminated if community members commit to work collaboratively with schools and homes to address societal violence.

Reflections on Method

This study used a questionnaire administered by the researcher to students in one of 2 settings: (a) students sat at individual desks in a classroom, completing the questionnaire alone and in silence; (b) students were seated in a group configuration, sharing extensive dialogue with their peers while completing their questionnaire.

It could be argued that students who completed a questionnaire in a group setting did not necessarily provide as individual a response as did the non-group students, nor were all questionnaires immune from tampering (as discussed in Chapter 3). At the same time, students who were in groups showed more enthusiasm for completing the questionnaire. The discussions amongst those students were animated, questions that were asked of the researcher were probing and often provocative.

It is my opinion that a beneficial method of gathering information on student perceptions of school violence is a combination of both group and individual data collection. In such a study, students would be asked to complete a questionnaire individually at their desks. At a later date, the same group of students would be requested to participate in small group discussions, focused on the key findings as obtained from their questionnaire data. Such a method could provide added perspectives and insights into a broader understanding of students' experiences of school violence.

A number of participants in the study would not fill out their questionnaires until such time as the teacher had left the room. Several students also asked the researcher repeatedly, for reassurances that their responses would not be shown to the principal or teachers of the school. For these reasons, it is recommended that only the researcher administer a student questionnaire on school violence and that students be reminded several times, that their anonymity will be preserved throughout the study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of junior high school students and administrators as to the nature, extent and management of school violence.

The data collected from the 231 students suggested that they generally felt safe at school. Students who indicated behaviors were more than a "little problem," did so on the basis of observation, not personal experience. This finding confirms the belief of many administrators and researchers (Mathews, 1994) that there are more student observers than victims or perpetrators of violence. What the results of this study did not establish however, is whether this majority were merely, as Mathews stated, "passive observers of violence" (1994, p. 39).

Indecision about the gravity of certain behaviors, a lack of confidence in knowing how to deal with potentially serious conflicts (e.g., threat with a weapon), hesitation over reporting the witnessing or victimization of violence, and fears of retaliation are findings from this study that question how "passive" these observers truly are.

Undoubtedly, for the 4% of students who indicated that they "never" felt safe at school, there is a serious need for schools to identify and deal with the problems that have led to this perception. The more important challenge for educators, is to recognize that school violence may affect far more students than is realized. An enhanced awareness of how student victims, perpetrators as well as observers respond to school-based violence would be invaluable. Such insights could be

instrumental in determining which strategies and programs best address response, intervention and prevention of school violence.

Schmidt et al. (1990) cautioned that schools were already overburdened with society's expectation that they will cure all of its ills. Nonetheless, as Auty warned: "problems arise when prevailing attitudes dictate that the maintenance of a safe school is somebody else's job." (cited in Orbit, 1993, p. 22.)

Having to play a pivotal role in addressing youth violence can be viewed by some educators as yet another added responsibility schools must assume that rightfully lies in the hands of others, be they parents, police or the larger community. Notwithstanding the legitimate frustration this must bring to administrators especially, there needs to be a recognition of the tremendous potential for schools to effect positive change.

As the data collected in this study imply, school violence does exist in Alberta's junior high schools. Moreover, victimization is often suffered in silence with long lasting and traumatic effects. For example, a recent article in the British Journal of Medicine (Dawkins, 1995) urged doctors to recognize that bullying was essentially a form of child abuse that could lead to high levels of distress, school absenteeism, and often suicide. Dawkins (1995) further stated that teachers, parents and other adults typically underestimate both the prevalence and effects of bullying, but "to ignore bullying is to condemn children to further bullying and may prejudice their academic achievements and adjustments in adult life" (p. 275).

I believe that the problem of youth violence can be mitigated through a multi-disciplinary approach, with schools playing a leadership role through their efforts to address violence in schools. Heather-Jane Robertson, Director of Professional Development with the Canadian Teachers' Federation, summarized the need for such a collaborative effort:

> Alone, no individual is sufficiently powerful to counteract the practices and beliefs that are nourished in a culture of violence. Yet, every act, however small, that challenges this culture weakens its hold on us. (Violence Prevention, 1995).

Certainly, schools have in many ways become a mirror of society; youth crime and violence spilling from streets to classrooms and vice versa. This should not preclude schools from positively influencing and leading society. Programs which focus on prevention, intervention and response must be on-going, in any effort to reduce and eliminate school violence; they must become a daily part of the curriculum; they must work towards facilitating a more peaceful and safer learning environment. Efforts in the area of school violence reflect a commitment to students that their safety and well-being is of paramount importance.

In response to the open-ended question in this study asking students what they felt could be done about school violence, numerous suggestions were provided ranging from preventative measures to more effective response towards victims and perpetrators.

One comment in particular served to emphasize the urgency for increased attention to the study of and response to school violence:

> Us students have seen alot of bad stuff. But everything goes when you adults turn your back on us. We don't want you to watch us all the time, but just experience how much we've seen through our years of schooling. But we live with it. We don't let (it) show that it bothers us. (Grade 8 student)

Left unchecked violence spreads, and to allow students to accept violence as a natural part of growing up, is irresponsible. As educators, our efforts to deal with school violence must be rigorous and have as their focus, a clear understanding of and compassion for children and the struggles that they are facing. In the words of Mahatma Ghandi:

> If we are to reach real peace in this world...
> we shall have to begin with the children.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire for Students

STUDENT SURVEY

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Sequential Number_____

Student Data

#1. Grade:___ Male ☐ Female ☐

Please mark (X or √) to the survey questions

#2. How would you classify these behaviors?

	Major	Minor	Undecided
fights	☐	☐	☐
threats with weapons	☐	☐	☐
verbal threats	☐	☐	☐
things damaged or stolen	☐	☐	☐
bullying	☐	☐	☐
punching, hitting, grabbing	☐	☐	☐
sexual harassment	☐	☐	☐
spitting	☐	☐	☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	☐	☐	☐
ethnic conflict	☐	☐	☐

#3. Please mark (X or √) what <u>you</u> have experienced at school:

- ☐ fights
- ☐ threats with weapons (knife, gun, other)
- ☐ verbal threats
- ☐ things damaged or stolen
- ☐ bullying
- ☐ punched, hit, grabbed
- ☐ sexual harassment
- ☐ spat upon
- ☐ teasing, swearing, name calling
- ☐ ethnic conflict
- ☐ other (please indicate) _____

#4. Are you happy with the way <u>victims</u> of these activites are dealt with at school ?

fights:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
threats with weapons:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
verbal threats:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
things damaged, stolen:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
bullying:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
punching, hitting, grabbing	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
sexual harassment:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
spat upon:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
ethnic conflict:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐

#5. Are you happy with the way <u>students that cause</u> these behaviours are dealt with at school?

fights:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
threats with weapons:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
verbal threats:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
things damaged, stolen:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
bullying:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
punched, hit, grabbed	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
sexual harassment:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
spat upon:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
ethnic conflict:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐

#6. Do you know how to deal with conflicts?

fights:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
threats with weapons:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
verbal threats:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
things damaged, stolen:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
bullying:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
punched, hit, grabbed	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
sexual harassment:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
spat upon:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
ethnic conflict:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐

#7. From what <u>YOU HAVE OBSERVED</u> in your school :

verbal threats are:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
fights are:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
weapons are:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
things damaged or stolen is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
bullying is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
punching, hitting, grabbing is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
sexual harassment:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
spitting is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
teasing, swearing, name calling is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
ethnic conflict is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐

#8. From what YOU HAVE PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED, in your school:

fights are:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
weapons are:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
verbal threats are:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
things damaged or stolen is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
bullying is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
punching, hitting, grabbing is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
sexual harassment:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
spitting is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
teasing, swearing, name calling is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
ethnic conflict is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐

#9. My teachers and principal are aware of what goes on in the school:

fights:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
threats with weapons:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
verbal threats:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
things damaged, stolen:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
bullying:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
punching, hitting, grabbing	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
sexual harassment:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
spitting :	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
ethnic conflict:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐

9. If YOU ARE THE VICTIM, would you tell the teacher or principal about:

If I was a victim of: **FIGHTS**

I would tell a teacher if	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a victim of: **VERBAL THREATS**

I would tell a teacher if	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a victim of: **THINGS DAMAGED OR STOLEN**

I would tell a teacher if	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a victim of:
BULLYING

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a victim of:
PUNCHING,HITTING GRABBING

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a victim of:
SEXUAL HARASSMENT

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a victim of:
THREATS WITH WEAPONS

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a victim of:
TEASING,SWEARING NAME CALLING

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a victim of:
ETHNIC CONFLICT

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

#10.If you were A WITNESS would you tell the teacher or principal about:

If I was a witness to:
FIGHTS

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Victim is					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to:
VERBAL THREATS

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Victim is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to:
THINGS DAMAGED OR STOLEN

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Victim is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to:
BULLYING

I would tell a teacher if	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Victim is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to:
PUNCHING,HITTING GRABBING

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Victim is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to: **SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Victim is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to: **THREATS WITH WEAPON**

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Victim is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to: **TEASING,SWEARING NAME CALLING**

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Victim is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to: **ETHNIC CONFLICT**

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Victim is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

#11. If you were A WITNESS would you tell the teacher or principal about:

If I was a witness to: FIGHTS

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to: VERBAL THREATS

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to: THINGS DAMAGED OR STOLEN

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to: BULLYING

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to:
PUNCHING,HITTING GRABBING

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to:
SEXUAL HARASSMENT

I would tell a teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to:
THREATS WITH WEAPONS

I would tell a teacher if	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to:
TEASING,SWEARING NAME CALLING

I would tell if	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

If I was a witness to:
ETHNIC CONFLICT

I would tell the teacher if,	Always	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Never	Undecided
Person causing behaviour is:					
A friend					
Not a friend					
Younger					
Older					
A boy					
A girl					
Popular					
Unpopular					
Others are watching					
No one else is watching					
Physically bigger than you					
Physically smaller than you					

#12. Do you feel safe at school?

Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never ☐ Undecided ☐

#13. What do YOU THINK about school violence? What can be done or whatever you wish to tell me

THANKS ALOT FOR YOUR HELP TODAY !!

Appendix B

Cover Letter -- Students

May 15,1995

Dear Parent:

As part of the requirements for my Master's degree in Educational Administration at the University of Alberta, I am conducting research in the area of school violence. Short questionnaires are being randomly distributed to junior high students and administrators throughout the province in the hopes of better understanding the nature and extent of the problem.

I will be personally supervising the completion of questionnaires for those students whose classes have been randomly selected. The teacher will not be present during the 15 minutes required. There are 12 short questions, all related to school violence, with no personal data requested other than the sex of the student and grade. Anonymity will be preserved as the results will be analyzed and presented as a group, not individually.

I have discussed this study with your son/daughter's class today and am requesting that they understand that they are not required to participate and that they may choose to opt out at any time even if they first consented to complete the questionnaire.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to sign this consent form, thereby allowing your daughter/son to participate in completing the questionnaire next week. The results will hopefully gain a better understanding of the extent and nature of violence in Alberta's junior high schools. As well, it is hoped that this increased awareness will translate into more effective resource allocation that will assist educators in their task of ensuring that staff and students can thrive in a **safe** learning environment.

Please complete the enclosed consent form, if you agree to have your child participate, and return it to the school in the enclosed envelope within **one week** of receipt. Your participation is most appreciated.

For any questions about the research, please contact me at:
(403) 922-2296.

Sincerely yours,

Irene M. MacDonald BSc.
(Graduate Student, University of Alberta Faculty of Education)

Appendix C

Questionnaire for Administrators

ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY

Please mark (X or √)

Sequential Number: _____

School data:

Urban ___
Rural ___

Separate ___
Public ___
Other ___

Student Population:

under 250 ___
251-500 ___
501-1000 ___
Over 1000 ___

Professional Data:

I have been an administrator for:

Under 2 years ___
2-5 years ___
5-10 years ___
Over 10 years ___

I have been an administrator in this school for:

Under 2 years ___
2-5 years ___
5-10 years ___
Over 10 years ___

#1. Do your students feel safe at school?

Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never ☐ Undecided ☐

#2. Please mark (X or √) what your students have experienced at school:

- ☐ fights
- ☐ threats with weapons (knife, gun, other)
- ☐ verbal threats
- ☐ things damaged or stolen
- ☐ bullying
- ☐ punched, hit, grabbed
- ☐ sexual harassment
- ☐ spat upon
- ☐ teasing, swearing, name calling
- ☐ ethnic conflict
- ☐ other (please indicate) _____

#3. How would you classify these behaviours?

fights	Major ☐	Minor ☐	Undecided ☐
threats with weapons	Major ☐	Minor ☐	Undecided ☐
verbal threats	Major ☐	Minor ☐	Undecided ☐
things damaged or stolen	Major ☐	Minor ☐	Undecided ☐
bullying	Major ☐	Minor ☐	Undecided ☐
punching, hitting, grabbing	Major ☐	Minor ☐	Undecided ☐
sexual harassment	Major ☐	Minor ☐	Undecided ☐
spitting	Major ☐	Minor ☐	Undecided ☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	Major ☐	Minor ☐	Undecided ☐
ethnic conflict	Major ☐	Minor ☐	Undecided ☐

#4. In your school :

fights are:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
weapons are:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
verbal threats are:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
things damaged or stolen is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
bullying is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
punching, hitting, grabbing is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
sexual harassment:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
spitting is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
teasing, swearing, name calling is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐
ethnic conflict is:	A very big problem☐	A big problem☐	A little problem☐	No Problem☐

#5. My staff and I are aware of what goes on in the school:

fights:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
threats with weapons:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
verbal threats:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
things damaged, stolen:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
bullying:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
punching, hitting, grabbing	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
sexual harassment:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
spitting :	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
ethnic conflict:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐

#6. Students in your school are satisfied with the way victims of these activites are dealt with?

fights:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
threats with weapons:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
verbal threats:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
things damaged, stolen:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
bullying:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
punching, hitting, grabbing	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
sexual harassment:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
spat upon:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
ethnic conflict:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐

#7. Students are satisfied with the way perpetrators of these behaviours are dealt with at school?

fights:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
threats with weapons:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
verbal threats:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
things damaged, stolen:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
bullying:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
punched, hit, grabbed	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
sexual harassment:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
spat upon:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
ethnic conflict:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐

#8. Do your students know how to effectively deal with conflicts?

fights:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
threats with weapons:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
verbal threats:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
things damaged, stolen:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
bullying	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
punched, hit, grabbed	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
sexual harassment:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
spat upon:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
ethnic conflict:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐

#9. Student VICTIMS in the school would tell a teacher or the principal about:

fights:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
verbal threats:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
threats with weapons:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
things damaged, stolen:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
bullying:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
punching, hitting, grabbing	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
sexual harassment	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
spitting :	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
ethnic conflict:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐

#10. Students who WITNESS such behavior in the school would tell a teacher or the principal about:

fights:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
verbal threats:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
threats with weapons:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
things damaged, stolen:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
bullying:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
punching, hitting, grabbing	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
sexual harassment:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
spitting :	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
teasing, swearing, name calling	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐
ethnic conflict:	Always☐	Most of the time☐	Sometimes☐	Never☐	Undecided☐

#11. In our school, staff are aware of what per centage of behaviors listed in this survey?

less than 25% ☐
between 25%-50% ☐
between 50%-75% ☐
over 75% ☐

#12 What do you think can be done about school violence?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE!

Appendix D

Cover Letter--Administrators

May 9, 1995

Dear [Principal's Name]:

I am presently conducting research in the area of violence in Alberta's junior high schools. Short questionnaires are being distributed to students and administrators within the Edmonton region in the hopes of better understanding the nature and extent of the problem.

This study is part of the requirement necessary for my Master's in Educational Administration at the University of Alberta. Your anonymity will be preserved, as the results will be analyzed and presented as a group, not individually. As well, no personal information is requested that will identify you personally, your school or your jurisdiction.

Please complete the enclosed survey within 2 weeks of receipt and return it to me in the envelope provided.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to assist me in this important study on school violence. The results will hopefully commence a larger discussion on the effects of societal violence on the staff and students of Alberta schools. As well, it is hoped that this increased awareness will translate into more effective resource allocation that will assist educators in their task of ensuring that staff and students thrive in a **safe** learning environment.

For any questions about the research, or request for the executive summary, please contact me at: (403) 922-2296.

Sincerely yours,

Irene M. MacDonald
(Graduate Student, University of Alberta Faculty of Education)

Appendix E

Consent Forms

PARENT PERMISSION FORM

I give my son/daughter consent to participate in completing a School Violence survey for the research described above, conducted by Irene MacDonald.

_____ _____
(Signature of Parent) (Date)

STUDENT PERMISSION FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in completing a survey on school violence as explained to me by the researcher, Irene MacDonald.

_____ _____
(Signature of Student) (Date)